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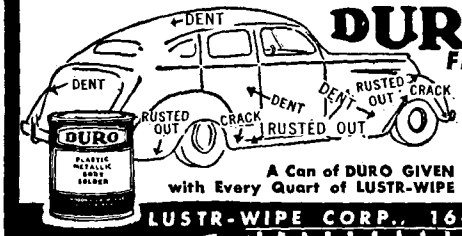

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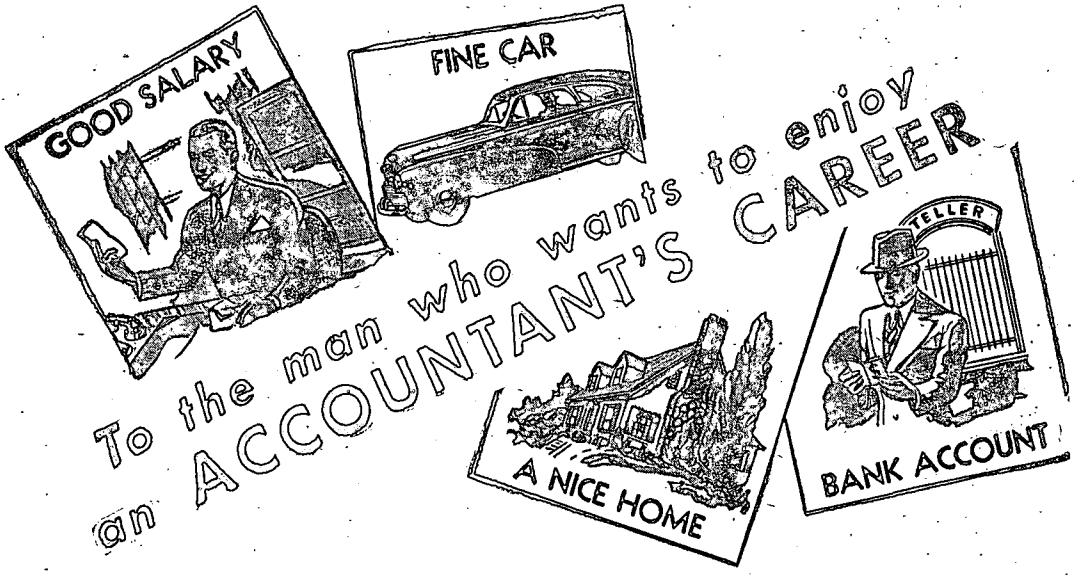

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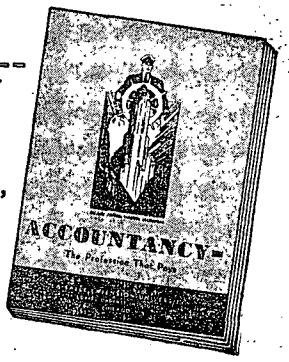

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STARTLING STORIES

Vol. 18, No. 1 A THRILLING PUBLICATION September, 1948

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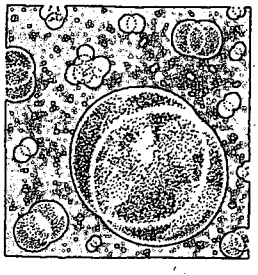

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Cover Painting by Earle Bergey—Illustrating "What Mad Universe"

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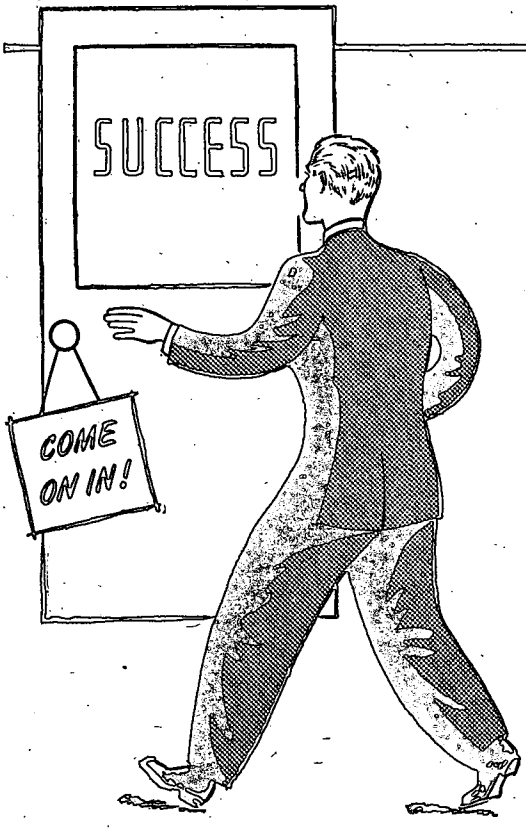

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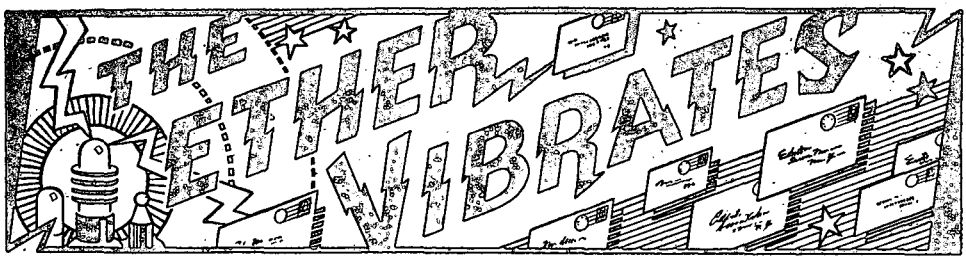

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It is our answer to those thousands of you who have, for so long now, been requesting that we enlarge this magazine. We started the ball rolling earlier this year by going up to 148 pages—and now we have taken a further step. Our companion magazine, THRILLING WONDER STORIES, will now likewise be 180 pages, and each magazine will cost 25c, or a nickel more, on the newsstands. There is no extra charge to present subscribers.

The first change to result from our second step-up in size is that both magazines, henceforth, will feature an extra department as we will add a science fiction book review column to this magazine and a regular commentary on science fiction amateur magazines in TWS.

We are now giving you readers, who never seem to get your science fiction in large enough doses, something really to sink your teeth in! These successive enlargements, with their resultant improvement in quality as well as quantity in 1948, make this year the most important period of progress we have known since STARTLING STORIES first saw the light of day nine years ago.

We wish you more and happier reading! And we hope you will write and tell us how you like next issue's augmented SS.

Belated STF-Club Registrants

A NUMBER of applicants who wished to be entered on the science fiction fan club list we ran in the July issue of STARTLING STORIES seem to have written in too late. Therefore, we shall tabulate them here as requested—but with a warning that no further list will be published until the December issue of our companion magazine, THRILLING WONDER STORIES.

Since we plan to make this a semi-annual custom, we wish that all of you club officials who want such listing will write in again, well ahead of August 15th, which will give us plenty of time to work you in. Please don't expect us to count previous entries and please list all changes of officers or address.

Now, the supplementary entries—

COLUMBUS SCIENCE FICTION SOCIETY
Anyone interested in joining this group should write Richard Layman, 523½ South Harris, Columbus, Ohio.

LOUISVILLE STF SOCIETY
President, Lester Fried, 2050 Midland, Louisville 4, Kentucky. Telephone, Highland 5684-W.

SCIENCE FICTION, INTERNATIONAL
Secretary-Treasurer, Dan Mulcahy, 4170 Utah Street, St. Louis, Missouri. Dues, 50c per annum.

MICHIGAN SCIENCE-FANTASY SOCIETY
Prospective members should contact Ben Singer, 3242 Monterey Drive, Detroit 6, Michigan, or Arthur H. Rapp, 2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Michigan.

THE STRANGER CLUB
Contact Dave Thomas, 31 Linnaean Street, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts.

THE TECHNOPOLARIANS
Contact Bill Groover, 113 North Porter Street, Saginaw, Michigan.

TOPEKA SCIENCE FICTION CLUB
A new-born organization for fans in the Kansas-Missouri area. Contact Linda Bowles, 931 North Jackson, Topeka, Kansas.

Let's hope that everyone writes in in time for the December fan-organization listing in the December TWS (remember the August 15th deadline) and that all of you who have already had your group's name in print in this column have reaped a full reward in broadened correspondence and membership rosters.

(Continued on page 8)

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*J. T., Mancelona, Mich.

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*D. E. G., Wausau, Wisc.

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I am finding a new joy that I never experienced before, for I have always wanted to play, but had given up hope until I heard of your course.
*C. S. Lucien, Okla.

Plays After 2 Months

I hesitated before sending for your course because of an earlier experience I had with a course by ear from another company. I am playing pieces now I never dreamed I would play after only two months.
*E. T., Prichard, Ala.

*Actual pupils' names on request. Pictures by professional models.

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 6)

Don't forget, we want to hear from all of you at least twice a year.

OUR NEXT ISSUE

WITH its featured novel in the November issue, AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT, SS introduces an author new to American science fiction readers although he is already established as a bright star in the British stf firmament—Arthur C. Clarke.

AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT is a magnificent imaginative achievement, a full-bodied tale of childhood and super-science in a world grown old with the passing eons—a world which has known an intergalactic empire and has forfeited same to dwell in isolated patches of its own surface which alone will support human existence.

It is a story of a youth who resents the physical and intellectual limitations that surround him, who delves deep into the roots of the past to create a future less hemmed in with ancestor-created restrictions. It is a story of human understanding and frailty and greatness, of high adventure and deep philosophy, of the furthest reaches of space and time.

It is a story which none of you who read it is likely soon to forget.

The Hall of Fame selection, according to recent custom since we attained greater size, is a long and epic novelet by that favorite of old-time stf fans, Festus Pragnell, entitled THE ISOTOPE MEN.

Christopher Barlem, in the interests of science, allows himself to be made "temporarily dead," so that he may explore the race memory of mankind—and emerges from his artificial catalepsy with an amazing tale of the first colonization of Earth by refugees from the planet that, millions of years ago, rode its proud orbit between Mars and Jupiter.

Today this former solar satellite is but a collection of asteroids wandering, dead and aimless, on its path in space. But formerly it was the seat of human science and civilization. What happened? Let Christopher Barlem tell the story in our November issue.

Other stories and novelets will be selected

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from a list of authors that includes Noel Loomis, Jack Vance, Rene LaFayette, Joe Gibson, John D. MacDonald, Murray Leinster, Henry Kuttner, Ray Bradbury and other stars, veteran and neophyte. We feel it a proud field to choose from.

JUST by way of whimsy we shall start off our longest letter department to date with the shortest missive received, a last-minute flash.

PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE!!!
by Con Pederson

Dear Editor: PLEASE *DON'T* print the letter I sent you recently!!!! I just read Ray Bradbury's AND THE MOON BE STILL AS BRIGHT—Don't print it don't print it don't print it.—*705 West Kelso, Inglewood, California.*

Best part of the whole thing is that Brother Pederson's missive was consigned to the wastebasket before his stop-press postcard was received. So we don't remember what it was all about. Besides, we like the postcard better. More urgent.

EPISTLE FROM BLOOMINGTON
by Bob Tucker

Dear Sir: The new issue is at hand and I feel compelled to take my pen in hand for a few words with you; I have never before written to an editor but I feel that having been a steady reader of "our mag" for twenty-three years entitles me to a hearing.

Clearly the best presentation in the issue was Rick Sneary's letter, and I'm glad to see that at last you have given up the practice of the cover painting illustrating nothing at all. I thought that the cover artist followed Sneary's plot very well indeed and captured on canvas the pictorial essence of the drama underlying Sneary's magnificent tale. This somewhat reminds me of the old days when Wesso used to present wonderful covers accurately picturing some fan's letter. Let's have a missive from Sneary every issue—well worth the twenty cents!

The second-best letter was that of Gerry de la Ree's, inasmuch as he used my name for one of his characters. I must admit that the science de la Ree employed is open to question, even in this fantastic age with new sciences cropping out of every broken atom, but then he managed to bring his letter to a fitting and logical climax so one mustn't gripe too much about the methods employed. The illustration for this letter wasn't too good.

Third in my estimation was the entry of this Paula Vreeland, but I do think you would do well to eliminate your bad puns from the blurbs—along with the dogged verse you are sometimes guilty of in the magazine. This was fantasy instead of science-fiction of course, but then I have no objection to a spot of fantasy now and then, especially when it is as well done as this item.

I also like the stories in the front of the book and sometimes read them first.—*P. O. Box #260, Bloomington, Illinois.*

(Continued on page 122)

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DARLING, THAT BULLY WON'T PICK ON YOU AGAIN.
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JOE YOUR NEW ENERGY AND APPEARANCE SURE DO A GOOD JOB! YOU EARNED YOUR PROMOTION.
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I'll teach you the "Progressive Power Method" through which I rebuilt myself from a physical wreck the doctors condemned to die at 15, to the holder of more strength records than any other living athlete or teacher! "Progressive Power" has proven its ability to build the strongest, handsomest men in the world. And I stand ready to show you on a money back basis—that no matter how flabby or puny you are I can do the same for you right in your own home. Let me prove I can add inches to your arms, broaden your shoulders, give you a man-sized chest, powerful legs and a Rock-like back—in fact, power pack your whole body so quickly it will amaze you! Yes, I'll jam you with power and confidence to master any situation—to win popularity—and to get ahead on the job! Through my proven secrets I bring to life new power in you inside and out, until YOU are fully satisfied you are the man you want to be.
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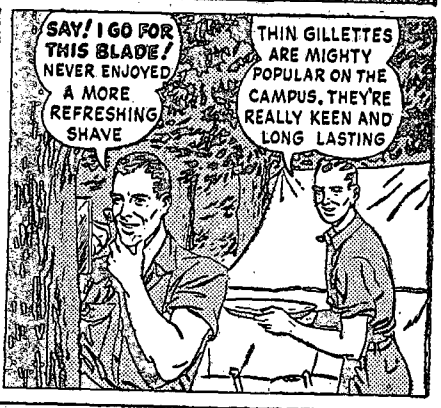
IT WAS NIP AND TUCK FOR JACK UNTIL . . .

JACK ROSS AND HIS GROUP OF STATE FORESTRY STUDENTS ARE LOOKING FOR A CAMPSITE AT THE END OF A DAY-LONG HIKE WHEN . . .

UNLESS YOUR MEAL'S TOO FAR ALONG, WE'D LIKE YOU TO JOIN US FOR SUPPER
SOUNDS WONDERFUL! WE CAN CLEAN UP IN A FEW MINUTES
ONE HOUR LATER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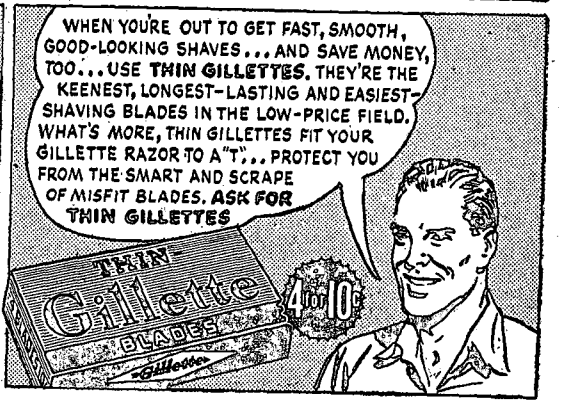
THIN GILLETTES ARE MIGHTY POPULAR ON THE CAMPUS. THEY'RE REALLY KEEN AND LONG LASTING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WHAT MAD UNIVERSE

by FREDRIC BROWN

When the first moon rocket fell back to earth with a flash, Keith Winton found himself catapulted into a world that couldn't be!

an astonishing complete novel

CHAPTER I

The Moon Rocket

THE first attempt to send a rocket to the moon, in 1952, was a failure. Probably because of a structural defect in the operating mechanism, it fell back to Earth, causing a dozen casualties. Although not containing any explosives, the rocket—in order that its landing on the moon might be observed from earth—contained a Burton potentiometor set to operate throughout the journey through space to build

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up a tremendous electrical potential which, when released on contact with the moon, would cause a flash several thousand times brighter than lightning—and several thousand times more disruptive. Fortunately, it came down in a thinly populated area in the Catskill foothills, landing upon the estate of a wealthy publisher of a chain of magazines. The publisher and his wife, two guests and eight servants were killed by the electrical discharge, which completely demolished the house and felled trees for a quarter of a mile around. Only eleven bodies were found. It is presumed that one of the guests, an editor, was so near the center of the flash that his body was completely disintegrated. The next—and first successful—rocket was sent in 1953, almost a year later.

* * *

KEITH WINTON was pretty well winded when the set of tennis was over but he tried not to show it. He hadn't played in years and tennis—he was just realizing—is definitely a young man's game. Not that he was old by any means—but at thirty-one you get winded unless you've kept in condition. Keith hadn't. He'd had to extend himself to win that set.

He extended himself a bit more, enough to leap across the net to join the girl on the other side. He was panting a little but he grinned at her.

"Another set? Got time?"

Betty Hadley shook her blond head. "'Fraid not, Keith. I'm going to be late now. I couldn't have stayed this long except that Mr. Borden promised to have his chauffeur drive me to the airport at Greeneville and have me flown back to New York from there. Isn't he a wonderful man to work for?"

"Uh-huh," said Keith, not thinking about Mr. Borden at all. "You've *got* to get back?"

"*Got* to," she said emphatically. "It's an alumnae dinner. My own alma mater and, not only that, but I've got to speak. To tell them how a love story magazine is edited."

"I could come along," Keith suggested, "and tell them how a science-fiction book is edited. Or a horror book, for that matter—I had *Bloodcurdling Tales* before Borden put me on *Surprising Stories*. That job used to give me nightmares. Maybe your fellow alumnae would like to hear about it, huh?"

Betty Hadley laughed. "They probably would. But it's strictly a hen party, Keith. And don't look so downhearted. I'll be seeing you at the office tomorrow. This isn't the end of the world, you know."

"Well, no," Keith admitted. He was wrong in a way but he didn't know that.

He fell into stride beside Betty as she started up the walk from the tennis court to the big house that was the summer estate of L. A. Borden, publisher of the Borden chain of magazines.

He sighed. "You ought to stay around to see the fireworks, though."

"Fireworks? Oh, you mean the moon rocket. *Will* there be anything to see, Keith?"

"They're hoping so. Read much about it?"

"Not a lot. I know the rocket is supposed to hit the moon like a flash of lightning or something. And they're hoping it'll be visible to the naked eye and everybody's going to be watching for it. Sixteen minutes after nine, isn't it?"

"Right. *I'm* going to be watching for it anyway. If you get a chance—watch the moon dead center, between the horns of the crescent. It's a new moon, in case you haven't been looking, and it'll hit in the dark area. Without a telescope it'll be a faint small flash, like somebody striking a match a block away. You'll have to be watching closely."

"They say it doesn't contain explosives, Keith? What is it that will make the flash?"

"Electrical discharge—on a scale nobody's ever tried before. There's a new-fangled outfit in it—guy by the name of Professor Burton worked it out—that uses the kickback of the acceleration and converts it into potential electrical energy—static electricity, of a kind. The rocket itself will be something on the order of a monster Leyden jar with a tremendous potential.

"When it hits the surface of the moon and busts up the insulating layer outside—well, it'll make the grand-daddy of all short circuits. It'll be like a flash of lightning, only probably three or four thousand times stronger than the biggest lightning bolt that ever hit earth."

"Sounds complicated, Keith. Wouldn't

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an explosive charge have been simpler?"

"In a way, yes, but we'll get a lot brighter flash from this—weight for weight—than even from an atomic warhead. And what they're interested in is a bright flash, not an explosion. Of course, it *will* tear up a little landscape—not as much as an A-bomb, though more than a block-buster—but that's incidental. And they expect to learn a lot about the exact composition of the surface

BETTY HADLEY

of the moon by training spectroscopes on the flash through every big telescope available. They—"

They'd reached the door of the house and Betty Hadley interrupted by putting her hand on his arm. "Sorry to interrupt you, Keith, but I *must* hurry. Honestly, or I'll miss the plane. 'Bye."

She put out her hand for him to take but Keith Winton put his hands on her shoulders instead and pulled her to him. He kissed her and, for a breathless second, her lips yielded under his. Then she broke away.

But her eyes were shining—and just a bit misty. She said, "'Bye, Keith. See you in New York."

"Tomorrow night? It's a date."

She nodded and ran on into the house. Keith stood there, a fatuous smile on his face, leaning against the doorpost.

IN LOVE again, he thought. And this time it wasn't quite like anything else that had ever happened to him. It was as sudden and violent as—well, as the flash on the moon was going to be at nine-sixteen tonight.

He'd known Betty Hadley only three days, seen her only once before this marvelous weekend—that had been Thursday when she'd first come to Borden Publications, Inc. The magazine she edited, *Perfect Love Stories,* had just been bought by Borden from a lesser chain. Part of the purchase contract had been that he could hire the editor who had done so well with it.

Perfect Love Stories had been a profitable magazine for three years now, due to Betty Hadley. The only reason the Whaley Publishing Co. had offered it for sale was that they were changing to exclusive publication of slicks. *Perfect Love* was their only surviving pulp.

So he'd met Betty Hadley on Thursday and, to Keith Winton, Thursday now seemed just about the most important day in his life to date. Friday he'd had to go to Philadelphia to see one of his writers, a guy who could really write but who'd been paid in advance for a lead novel and didn't seem to be doing anything about writing it. He'd tried to get the writer started on a plot, and thought he'd succeeded.

Anyway, he'd missed seeing Joe Doppelberg, his prize fan, who'd picked Friday to happen to be in New York and to call at the Borden offices. Maybe that was a gain, judging from Joe Doppelberg's letters.

And then, yesterday afternoon, he'd come out here at Borden's invitation. And just another weekend on the boss's estate (this was the third time Keith had been here) had turned into sheer magic when Betty Hadley turned out to be one of the other two guests from the office.

Betty Hadley—tall and lithe and golden blonde, with soft sun-tanned skin, with a face and figure that belonged on the television screen rather than in an editorial office—how *she* ever got to be an editor—

He sighed and went on into the house. In

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the big walnut-paneled living room, Borden and Walter Callahan, head accountant for Borden, were playing gin rummy.

Borden looked up as he came in. "Hi, Keith. Want to take over after this game? It's nearly finished. I've got some letters to write and Walter would probably as soon take your money as mine."

Keith shook his head. "Got to do some work myself, Mr. Borden. I'm smack against deadline on the Rocketalk Department; I brought my portable and the letter file along."

"Oh, come now. I didn't bring you out here to *work*. Do it at the office tomorrow."

"Wish I could," Keith said. "But it's my own fault for getting behind and the stuff has to go to the printer tomorrow morning at ten sharp. They're closing the forms at noon. It's only a couple of hours work and I'd rather get it done now and be free this evening."

He went on through the living room and upstairs. In his room he took his typewriter out of its case and put it on the desk. From his brief-case he took the file-folder that held the incoming correspondence addressed to Rocketalk Department or, in the case of the less inhibited letters, to The Rocketeer.

On top of the stack was Joe Doppelberg's letter. He'd put it there because it had said Joe Doppelberg was coming to call in person and he had wanted to have it handy.

He worked paper into the typewriter and put down *Rocketalk* as a heading, then took a deep breath and dived in.

Well, fellow space-pilots, tonight—the night I'm writing this, not the night you're reading it—is the big night, *the* big night, and the ole Rocketeer was out there to see it. And see it he did, that flash of light on the dark of the moon that marked the landing of the first successful missile launched through space by man.

He looked at it critically, then yanked the paper out of the machine and put in fresh. It was too formal, too stilted. He lighted a cigarette and wrote it again and it came out better—or worse.

IN THE pause while he read it over he heard a door open and close and high-heeled footsteps clicking down the stairs. That would be Betty, leaving. He got up to go to the door and then sat down again. No, it would be anticlimactic to say good-bye again, now, with the Bordens and Callahan around. Much better to leave it on the note of that quick but breathless kiss and the promise of seeing him tomorrow evening.

He sighed and picked up the top letter. It said:

Dear Rocky-Tear: I shouldn't ought to write you atall, because your last ish stinks to high Arcturus, except for the Wheeler yarn. Who ever told that mug Gormley he could write? And his space-navigation? The big bohunk couldn't peelot a rowboat across Mud Crick on a sunny day.

And that Hooper cover—the gal was okay, more than okay, tho what gals aren't on covers? But that thing chasing her—is it supposed to be one of the Mercurian devils in the Wheeler story? Well, tell Hooper I can think of scarier BEMs than them, cold sober, without even a slug of Venusian sappy-sap.

Why don't she just turn around and chase *it?* Keep Hooper on the inside—his black and white stuff is okay—and get somebody else for covers. How about Rockwell Kent or Dali? I'll bet Dali could make a dilly of a BEM. Get it, Rocky? Dali-dilly.

Lookit, Rocky, get the Uranian bug-juice ready and iced because I'm going to beard the lyin' in his den, come Friday. Not coming to Spaceport N'Yawk just to see you, Rocky, don't flatter yourself on that. But because I got to see a Martian about a dog-star anyway, I'll be in town, and I'm going to see if you're as ugly as they say you are.

One recent idea of yours, Rocky, is tops. That's running half-col pix of your best and regularest correspondents with their letters. So I got a surprise for you. I'm sending mine. I was going to bring it, but this letter'll get there before I do and I might miss an ish going to press in between.

Ennahoo, Rocky, kill the fatted moon-calf, because I'll be seeing you Friday.

Joe Doppelberg.

Keith Winton sighed again, and picked up his pencil. He marked out the paragraph about the trip to New York—that wouldn't interest the other readers and he didn't want to give too many of them the idea of dropping in at the office. He could waste too much time that way.

He penciled out a few of the cornier phrases in the other parts of the letter, then picked up the snapshot that had come with the letter and glanced at it again.

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Joe Doppelberg didn't look like his letter. He was a not bad, rather intelligent looking, kid of sixteen or seventeen with a nice grin. Sure, he'd run it with the letter. Should have sent it to the photoengraver before but there was still time. He marked the copy to be set with a half-column runaround for a cut, wrote "½-col Doppelberg" on the back of the photograph.

He put the second page of Joe's letter into the typewriter, thought a moment and typed at the bottom:

"So okay, Doppelberg, we'll get Rockwell Kent to do our next cover. You pay him. But as for having the glamour-gals chasing the BEMs, it can't be done. Gals in stf are always chaste. Get it, Doppelberg? Chaste-chased. And that ain't half as bad as your Dali-dilly, either."

He took the page out of the typewriter, sighed and picked up the next letter.

He finished at six, which left him an hour before dinner. He took a quick shower and dressed and there was still half an hour left. He wandered downstairs and out the French doors that led to the garden.

It was just turning dusk and the new moon was already visible in the clear sky. The seeing would be good, he thought. And, darn it,

Keith pulled free of the Lunan and ran (CHAPTER III)

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that rocket-flash had *better* turn out to be visible to the naked eye or he'd have to write a new opening paragraph for the Rocketalk Department. Well, there'd be time for that after nine-sixteen.

He sat down on a wicker bench beside the main path through the garden, and sniffed deeply of the fresh country air and the scent of flowers all about him. He thought about Betty Hadley, and just what he thought about her doesn't need to be recorded here.

But it kept him happy—perhaps happily miserable would be a better description—until his mind wandered to the writer in Philadelphia and he wondered if the so-and-so was actually working on that story or was out getting plastered.

Darn it, he really needed that novel for the October book. Borden had okayed the pay in advance but just the same it had been his, Keith's idea and Borden was going to blame him if the story didn't materialize.

He thought about Betty Hadley again and then he thought about all the criticisms the Hooper covers had been getting and wondered if he *could* find a cover artist who'd be really good on both beautiful heroines and horrible monsters. Hooper was a nice guy but he just didn't have bad enough nightmares to please the customers. Like Joe Doppelberg, most of the fans seemed to want—

The rocket, falling back to Earth, was traveling faster than sound and he neither saw nor heard it, although it struck only two yards away from him.

There was a flash.

CHAPTER II

The Purple BEM

THERE was no sense of transition, of movement, nothing of lapse of time. One instant, Keith Winton had been sitting upon a wicker bench; in the same instant, it seemed, he was lying flat on his back staring up at the evening sky.

There had been the flash and *this*—simultaneously.

Only it couldn't have been merely that the wicker bench had collapsed under him—or even vanished from under him—because it had been under a tree and there was now no tree between him and the sky.

He raised his head first and then sat up, for the moment too shaken—not physically but mentally—to stand up. Somehow he wanted his bearings first, before he quite trusted his knees.

He was sitting on grass, smoothly mowed grass, in the middle of a yard. Behind him, when he looked around, was a house—a quite ordinary house, but it wasn't Mr. Borden's house. It had the look, somehow, of a vacant house. At least, there was no sign of life, no light at any window.

He stared at the house wonderingly, then turned back to look the other way. A hundred feet away, at the edge of the lawn on which he sat, was a hedge and at the other side of the hedge were trees—two orderly rows of them, as though on each side of a road. They were tall poplars.

He stood up a bit cautiously. There was a momentary touch of dizziness but, outside of that, he was all right. Whatever had happened to him he wasn't hurt. He stood still until the dizziness passed and then started walking toward the gate in the hedge.

He looked at his wrist watch. It was five minutes of seven and that was impossible, he thought. Because it had been five minutes of seven, just about, when he'd been sitting on that bench in Mr. Borden's garden. And wherever he was now he couldn't have got here in nothing flat.

He held the wrist watch to his ear, and it was still ticking. But that didn't prove anything. Maybe it had stopped from—from whatever had happened and had started again when he had stood up and started walking.

He looked up again at the sky. No, it had been dusk then and it was dusk now. Not much time could have elapsed, if any. And the crescent moon was in the same place—at least it was the same distance from the zenith. He couldn't be sure here (wherever *here* was) about his bearings and directions.

The gateway through the hedge led to an asphalt-paved three-lane highway. As he closed the gate he looked again at the house and saw something he hadn't noticed before—a sign on one of the porch pillars that read *For Sale. R. Blaisdell, Greeneville, N. Y.*

Then he must still be near Greeneville, which was the nearest town to Borden's estate. But that was obvious anyway—the real question was how he could be anywhere at all out of sight of where he'd been sitting

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only minutes ago. It was only seven o'clock, even now.

He shook his head to clear it. Amnesia? Had he walked here, wherever here was, without knowing it? It didn't seem possible, particularly in minutes or less.

He looked uncertainly up and down the asphalt roadway, wondering which way to walk. There wasn't another building in sight anywhere that he could see. But across the road were cultivated fields. If there was a farm there'd be a farmhouse. He decided to cross beyond the far row of poplars and see if he could see it from there. If not, he could just walk. Sooner or later he'd come to a place where he could ask questions and get his bearings.

He was halfway across the road when he heard the sound of the approaching car, still out of sight beyond the next rise. He went on to the far edge of the road, turned and waited. It wasn't coming fast from the sound of it and maybe—

It came into sight, then, a Model T of ancient vintage that just barely seemed to make the top of the hill it had been climbing. Then, as it chugged and began to gather speed again coming toward him, Keith stepped out into the road and held up his hand. The Ford slowed down and stopped beside him.

The man at the wheel leaned over and lowered the window on Keith's side. "Want a lift, mister?" he asked. He looked, Keith thought, almost too much like a farmer to be one. He was even chewing a long yellow straw, just the color of his hair, and his faded blue overalls matched his faded blue eyes.

KEITH put a foot on the running board and leaned his head into the car through the open side window. He said, "I'm afraid I'm lost. Do you know where L. A. Borden's place is?"

The farmer rolled the straw to the opposite corner of his mouth. He thought deeply, frowning with the effort.

"Nope," he said, finally. "Never heard of him. Not on this road. Mebbe over on the pike. I don't know all the farms there."

"It isn't a farm," Keith told him. "A country estate. He's a publisher. Where does this road go?"

"Greeneville ahead, ten miles, or so. Back t'other way it hits the Albany Highway at Carteret. Want a lift to Greeneville? Guess you can get your bearing there, find out where this Borden lives."

"Sure," Keith said. "Thanks." He got into the car.

He was going to be late for dinner but at least he'd know where he was. In Greeneville he could phone Borden and then hire a car to drive him out. He'd be there by nine at the latest.

The old car chugged along the winding road. His benefactor didn't seem to want to talk and Keith was glad of that. He wanted to think, instead, to try to figure out what possibly could have happened.

Borden's estate was a big one. If the driver of the ancient jaloppy knew everybody along the road he couldn't possibly not have heard of Borden's place if it were very close. Yet it *couldn't* be more than twenty miles away, because it was ten miles from Greeneville—and so was the spot where he'd been picked up along the road. Even if those ten-mile distances were in opposite directions. And even that far was silly, since it had been a matter of minutes at the most.

They were coming to the outskirts of a town now and he looked at his watch again. It was seven thirty-five. He looked out of the window of the car at the passing buildings—they were on a business street now—until he saw a clock in a window and compared his watch with it. The watch was right. It hadn't stopped and started again.

The jaloppy swung into the curb and parked. "This is about the middle of town, mister," the driver said. "Guess you can look up your party in the phone book and you'll be all right."

"Sure—that's my best bet. Thanks a lot."

Keith went into the drugstore on the corner and to the phone booth at the back. There was a slender Greeneville phone book hanging by a chain from one side of the booth and he leafed through it to the B's, and to—

There wasn't any Borden listed.

Keith frowned. Borden's phone was in the Greeneville exchange. He remembered having called the number a time or two from New York City. And it had been a Greeneville number all right.

Could it be an unlisted number? That was possible, of course. Wait a minute—he ought to be able to remember it—it had been three numbers all alike—ones. That was it—Greeneville 111. He remembered wondering if Borden had used pull with the phone company to get himself a listing like that.

He pulled the door of the booth shut and

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found a nickel out of the change in his pocket. But the phone was a type he hadn't seen before. There didn't seem to be any slot for a coin to go in. Maybe they didn't have coin phones in these little upstate towns, he decided, and he'd be supposed to pay the druggist for the call.

He picked up the receiver and, when an operator's voice asked, "Number, please?" he gave it. There was a minute's pause and then the operator's voice came back. "There's no such number listed, sir."

For a second, Keith thought he must be going crazy. Then he shook his head. He asked, "You have a phone listed for L. A. Borden? I thought that was the number. Can't find him listed in the phone book but I know he's got a phone."

"One minute, sir . . . No, there is no such name on our listings."

"Thanks," Keith said and put the receiver back.

He still didn't believe it. He stepped out of the booth and picked up the phone book again. He looked in it again and there still wasn't any L. A. Borden listed.

Suddenly he snapped the book shut and looked at the cover. It read, *Greeneville, N. Y.* A momentary suspicion that he was in the wrong Greeneville died and another fainter suspicion died before it was born when he read the smaller type—*Spring, 1952.*

He still didn't believe it somehow. He wanted to open that book and go through the B's again.

INSTEAD, he walked forward to the soda counter and sat down on one of the old-fashioned wire-legged stools. Behind the counter the druggist—a little gray-haired man with thick spectacles—was polishing glasses. He looked up. "Yes, sir?"

"A Pepsi, please," Keith said. He wanted to ask questions but he didn't know what questions to ask. He watched while the druggist drew the Pepsi.

"Beautiful night out," the druggist said.

Keith nodded. He'd have to remember to watch for the flash of that moon rocket, whatever else happened. He looked at his watch. Almost eight—another hour and a quarter and he'd be outside, watching the dark of the moon.

He drank the Pepsi almost at a gulp. It tasted cool and good but it made him realize he was getting hungry. Eight o'clock—why, dinner was over by now at the Bordens' place! He looked around back of the soda fountain for any signs indicating that the druggist served sandwiches or other food. Apparently he didn't.

Keith took a quarter out of his pocket and put it on the marble top of the soda fountain.

It rang metallically and the druggist dropped the glass he had been polishing. Behind the thick glasses the druggist's eyes got wide and scared, and he stood there without moving his body but his head swiveled back and forth from one end of the store to the other. He didn't seem to realize or notice that he'd dropped and broken a glass. The towel too fell from his fingers.

Then his hand went forward, covered the coin and picked it up. Again he looked both ways as though making sure he and Keith were alone in the store. Then, shielding the coin deep in his cupped hands, he stared at it, moving it close to his eyes. He turned it over and studied the other side.

Then his frightened eyes went back to Keith's face.

"Beautiful!" he said. "Hardly worn at all. And a nineteen twenty-eight." His voice was so soft it was almost a whisper. "But—who sent you?"

Keith closed his eyes and opened them again. "Either I'm crazy," he thought, "or he is."

"Nobody," he said.

The little druggist smiled slowly. "You don't want to tell. It must have been K. Well, never mind that, in case it wasn't. I'll take a chance. I'll give you a thousand credits for it."

Keith didn't say anything.

"Two thousand, then. I know it's worth more but that's all I can give you. If my wife— "

"All right," Keith said.

The hand that held—and concealed—the coin dived into the druggist's pocket like a prairie-dog popping into its hole. Unnoticed glass crunched under the druggist's shoes as he walked down to the cash register at the end of the counter and punched a key. *No Sale* came up behind the glass. He came back, counting bills, and put a pile of them in front of Keith Winton.

"Two thousand," he said. "Almost breaks me but I guess it's worth it. I'm a little crazy, I guess."

Keith picked up the bills and looked long and hard at the top one. There was a fa-

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The match flame revealed a hideous scarred face—and above it a club raised to strike (CHAPTER V)

miliar picture of George Washington in the center of it. The figure in the corners was *100* and under the oval portrait of Washington was spelled out *One Hundred Credits.*

And that was silly, too, Keith thought. Washington's picture belonged only on *one* dollar bills. Unless things were different here. *Here?*

He looked again, read more printing. *United States of America,* he read. *Federal Reserve Note.* And it wasn't a new bill. It looked worn and circulated and genuine. There were the familiar little silk threads. A serial number in blue ink. To the right of the portrait, *Series of 1935,* and a reproduced signature, *Fred M. Vinson,* over fine type, *Secretary of the Treasury.*

Slowly, Keith folded the little stack of bills and put them into his coat pocket.

He looked up, and his eyes met those of the druggist, looking out at him through the thick spectacles, looking anxiously. The druggist's voice was anxious, too.

He said, "It's—it's all right, isn't it? You're not an agent? I mean, if you are you've *got* me now, for collecting and you might as well arrest me and get it over with. I took a chance and, if I lose, there's no use keeping me in suspense, is there?"

"No," Keith said slowly. "It's all right. Can I have another Pepsi, please?"

This time some of the Pepsi slopped out as the druggist put it down on the marble. And, as glass again crunched under the drug-

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gist's shoes, he smiled nervously and apologetically at Keith, got a broom from the corner and began to sweep behind the counter.

KEITH sipped his second Pepsi and thought. If, that is, one could call the whirl of things inside his head thinking. It was more like a ride on a pinwheel. He watched until the druggist had finished with the broom.

"Look," he said. "I'd like to ask you a few questions that may seem—uh—crazy to you. But I've got a reason for asking them. Will you answer them, no matter how they sound to you?"

The druggist looked at him carefully. "What kind of questions, mister?"

"Well—what is the exact date?"

"June tenth, nineteen fifty-two."

"A. D.?"

The druggist's eyes got wider again, but he said, "Of course."

"And this is Greeneville, New York?"

"Yes. You mean you don't know—"

"Let me ask," Keith said. "Do you know a man named L. A. Borden who has a big estate near here? A magazine publisher?"

"No. Of course I don't know everybody around here."

"You've heard of the Borden chain of magazines that he runs?"

"Oh sure. We sell them. New issues just came in today of some of them. Over on the stand there. The July issues."

"And the moon rocket? This is the night it lands?"

"I don't understand what you mean, 'This is the night.' It lands every night. It's in by now. We'll be getting customers any minute. Some of them drop in on their way to the hotel."

Again, for a moment, Keith closed his eyes. He thought, "I'm crazy or he is."

He opened his mouth to ask another question, closed it again. He was afraid. He wanted something familiar to reassure him and he thought he knew what it would be. He got up off the stool and walked over to the rack of magazines. He saw *Perfect Love Stories* first, and picked it up. The cover girl reminded him a little of the editor, Betty Hadley—only she wasn't as beautiful as Betty. How many magazines, he wondered, had editors more beautiful than their cover girls? But Betty Hadley—

He shoved Betty Hadley resolutely to the back of his mind and looked for *Surprising Stories* and saw it. He picked it up too.

Yes, the July issue. Just the same as—

Was it? The cover was the same scene but the art work wasn't quite the same. It was better, more vivid. It was Hooper's technique, all right, but as though Hooper had been *taking lessons*. The gal on the cover was more breathtakingly beautiful than he'd remembered her to be from the cover proofs and the monster—he shuddered.

In general outline, it was the same monster but there was a subtle difference, a horrible difference, that he couldn't put his finger on—and felt he wouldn't *want* to put his finger on. Not even wearing asbestos gloves.

But the signature was there—when he was able to tear his eyes away from the monster. A tiny crooked characteristic H that was Hooper's way of signing all his pics.

And then, in the logo at the bottom right corner, he saw the price. It wasn't 20c.

It was 2 cr.

Two credits?

What else?

Very slowly and carefully he folded the two magazines, the two incredible magazines (for he saw now that *Perfect Love Stories* was also priced at 2 cr.) and put them into his pocket.

He wanted to get off somewhere by himself and study those two books, read and digest every word of them.

But first, he'd have to pay for them and get out of here. Two credits? How much *was* two credits? The druggist had given him two thousand credits for a quarter, but that could hardly be a criterion. That quarter, for some reason he'd have to learn, was a rare and precious object to the man who had bought it from him.

NO, THE magazines were a better clue. If their value were an approximate criterion, then two credits was roughly equivalent to twenty cents. And if that were true the druggist had given him the equivalent of—let's see—two hundred dollars for a quarter in hard money.

He shouldn't have done it—he should have been more careful—but the shock of seeing that almost-but-not-quite cover for the July book of his own doing made him a bit slaphappy for the moment. Change rattled in his pocket as he walked back to the soda counter. His hand plunged into his pocket and found a half dollar.

How would the druggist react to *that?*

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Casually, he tossed it down on the marble. "I'll take the two magazines," he said. "Got change for a half?"

The druggist reached out a hand for the coin and the hand trembled.

Suddenly, Keith felt ashamed of himself. He shouldn't have done that. And it would lead to conversation, inevitably, that would keep him from getting off by himself to read the magazines.

He said gruffly, "Keep it. You can have them both—the quarter and the half—for what you gave me." He turned and started out of the store.

He started—that was all.

He took one step and froze. Something was coming in the open doorway of the drug-store. Something that wasn't human.

Something that was over seven feet tall—so tall that it had to stoop slightly to get through the doorway—and that was covered with bright purple fur except for its hands, feet and face. Its hands feet and face were purple, too. Its eyes were flat white disks, pupil-less. It didn't have a nose, but it had teeth, plenty of teeth.

And suddenly, from behind, a hand grabbed Keith's arm and the druggist's voice, suddenly fierce and shrill was shouting:

"Nineteen forty-three! *A fake!* And the other must be a fake, too. He's a spy! An Arcturian. Get him. Lunan. Kill him!"

The purple thing in the doorway made a shrieking noise that was almost supersonic in pitch. It spread its purple arms and came toward him looking like something out of a nightmare that Gargantua might have.

The druggist, yelling, *"Kill him! Kill him, Lunan!"* was climbing up Keith's back but—in the face of what was coming at him from the front of the store—Keith hardly noticed that.

He turned and ran the other way, to the back of the store, losing the druggist en-route. There *had* to be a door at the back of the store. If there weren't he had a feeling he'd *make* one.

CHAPTER III

Shoot on Sight

THERE was a door. Something clawed down his back as he went through it. He pulled free, heard his coat rip. He slammed the door and heard a yelp of pain—not a human one—behind him. But he didn't turn around. He ran.

He didn't turn until, half a block away, he heard the sound of a pistol report behind him and felt a sudden pain as though a red-hot poker were being drawn across his upper arm. He turned his head then, just for a second. The purple *thing* was coming after him. It was about halfway between the door he'd just left at the back of the store and Keith. But, despite its long legs, it seemed to run slowly and awkwardly. Apparently he could outdistance it easily.

The purple thing carried no weapon. The shot that had seared Keith's shoulder, he saw, had come from the little druggist who, a big old-fashioned revolver in his hand, was standing just outside the door. The pistol was aiming for another shot. He heard the shot as he dived into the areaway between two buildings—but the bullet must have gone past him harmlessly for he didn't feel it.

Then he was between the buildings and, for a moment, he thought he had run into a blind alley. There was only a blank brick wall at the end of the areaway. But there were doors to the buildings on either side and one of them was standing ajar. He closed and locked it behind him.

He stood there in the dimness, panting, and looked about him. He was in a hallway. Toward the street, stairs led upward. In the other direction, there was another door. That would lead to the alley.

Sudden hammering sounded on the door he had just entered—hammering and the babble of excited voices.

Keith ran to the back door, opened it and was out into the alley. He ran between two buildings that would front on the next street. He slowed down his pace as he neared the sidewalk and emerged at a normal walk.

He turned in the direction that would take him to the main street, half a block away, then hesitated. It was a fairly crowded, busy street. Was there safety or danger in crowds? He stood in the shadow of a tree a dozen paces short of the corner and watched.

It looked like normal traffic on a normal small city main street—for a moment. Then, walking arm in arm, two of the purple-furred monsters went by. The people before and after them paid no attention to them. Whatever they were, they were—*accepted*. They were normal. They belonged here.

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Here? But where, what, when was *here?*

What mad universe that took for granted an alien race more horrible looking than the worst Bem that had ever leered from a science-fiction magazine cover?

What mad universe in which he was given what seemed to be the equivalent of two hundred dollars for a quarter and attacked when he offered a half-dollar? Yet whose credit-currency bore a picture of George Washington and current dates and which had provided—they were still folded in his pocket—current and only subtly different issues of *Surprising Stories* and *Perfect Love Stories?*

A world with asthmatic Model T Fords—and space-travel? There must be space travel. Those purple things had never evolved on Earth—if this were Earth. The druggist had said, about the moon rocket, "It lands every night."

And then—what was it the druggist had shouted just before the Bem had attacked him? *"An Arcturian spy?"* But that was absurd. Arcturus was light-years away. The druggist had called the monster *Lunan.* A proper name—or an inhabitant of Luna?

". . . It lands every night. It's in by now. We'll be getting customers any minute. Some of them drop in on their way to the hotel."

Suddenly Keith was aware that his shoulder hurt him and that there was a wet, sticky feeling on his upper arm. He looked down and saw that the sleeve of his sport jacket was soaked with blood, looking black rather than red in the twilight and the shadow of the tree. And there was a deep gouge in the cloth where the bullet had creased it.

HE NEEDED attention for that wound, to stop the bleeding. Why not walk out there, look for a policeman—were there policemen here?—and give himself up, tell the truth?

The truth? What was the truth? Tell them, "You're all wrong. This is the United States, Earth, Greeneville, New York, and it's June, nineteen hundred fifty-two, all right—but there isn't any space travel except an experimental rocket that hasn't landed yet and dollars are the currency and not credits—even if they've got Fred M. Vinson's signature and Washington's picture—and there aren't any purple Bems and a guy named L. A. Borden lives near here and will explain who I am."

Impossible, of course. From what he'd seen and heard there was only one person *here* who would believe any of that and that one person would promptly be locked up in a nuthouse if nothing worse.

No, he didn't want to do that. Not yet, anyway—not until he'd had time to orient himself a little better and find out what it was all about.

Somewhere, blocks away, sirens wailed, coming closer. Police cars, if that siren-sound meant the same thing here that it did in more familiar surroundings.

Quickly he crossed the quiet side street, went through another alley and then, keeping in the shadows as much as possible, put another few blocks between himself and the main street. He shrank back into the shadow of another areaway as a squad car turned the corner with siren shrieking. It went past.

He had to find sanctuary somewhere, even though there was risk in finding it. He couldn't wander long this way without being seen—not with blood on his sleeve and the back of his coat, he remembered now, torn.

There was a sign *Rooms for Rent* in the window of the next building. Did he dare take a chance? The feel of blood running down past his elbow told him he'd have to.

Keeping in the shadows as much as he could, he went to the door and looked in through the glass. Perhaps, if he kept his bad side away from the clerk . . .

But there wasn't any clerk at the desk inside the door. There was a push-bell on the desk and a sign, *Ring for Clerk.* Perhaps . . .

He opened the door as quietly as he could and closed it the same way. He tiptoed to the desk and studied the rack behind it. There were a row of boxes, some with mail, a few with keys in them. He looked around carefully and then leaned across the desk and picked the key out of the nearest box. It was numbered 201.

He looked around again. No one had seen him. He tiptoed to the stairs. They were carpeted and didn't creak and 201 was right at the head of them.

Inside the room he locked the door behind him and turned on the light. Now, if only the occupant of 201 didn't come in within the next half hour, he had a chance.

He stripped off his coat and shirt and studied the wound. It was going to be painful but not dangerous. The gouge was half an inch deep but the bleeding was already slowing down.

He made sure by looking in the dresser

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drawer that the missing occupant of 201 had shirts—within half a size of his own—and then he ripped apart the shirt he had just taken off and used it to bandage the arm, winding it around and around so that the blood would soak through slowly if at all.

Then he appropriated a dark shirt from the dresser—picking a dark one because his own had been white—and a necktie from the rack. One of three suits that hung in the closet was dark blue, a perfect contrast to his own light tan and he put it on. There was a straw hat too. At first he thought it too big for him but, with a little paper folded under the sweat-band, it served.

He made a quick estimate and translation of the value of the things he'd taken, and left a five-hundred-credit note on the bureau. Fifty dollars should be ample. The suit, the main item, was neither new nor expensive.

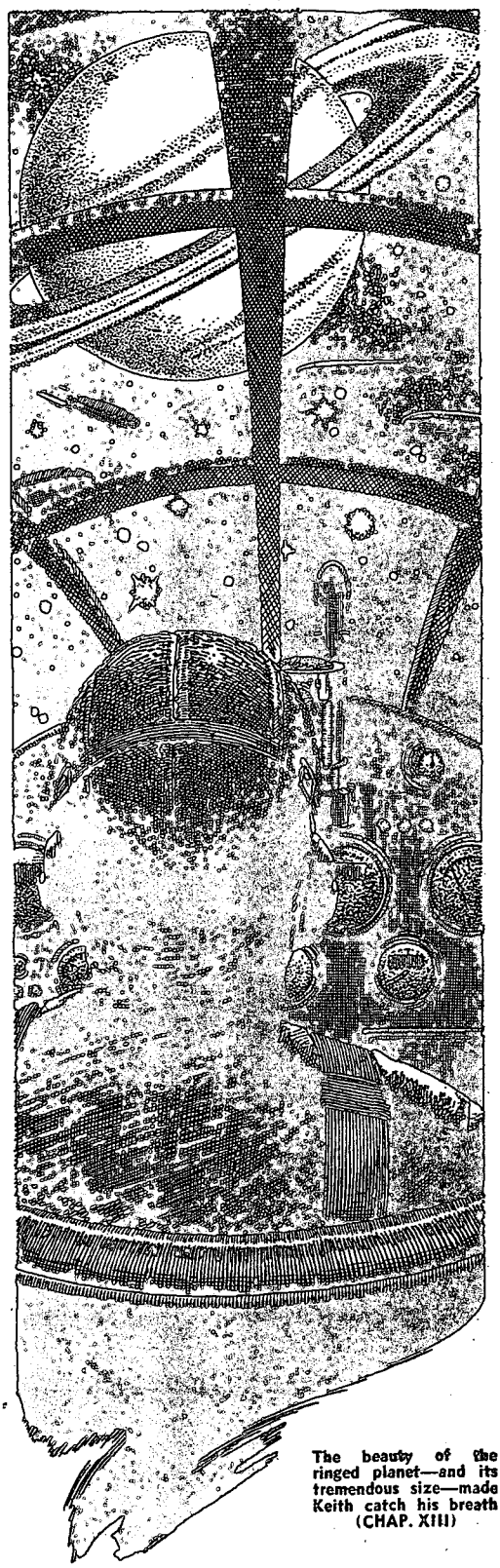
He made his own clothes into a bundle, wrapped with some newspaper that had been in the closet. Much as he wanted to study and read those newspapers, he knew that getting out of here and to a safer place came first.

He opened the door and listened. There was still no sound from the little lobby downstairs. He went down the stairs as silently as he had come up them and was safely outside again. Now, with a complete change of clothing, with no blood visible from his wounded arm, he needn't fear the prowling cars. Only the druggist—or the Lunan—could identify him and he'd give the drugstore a wide berth.

He got rid of his bundle in the first handy waste receptacle and then, walking as nonchalantly as he could, ventured onto the crowded main street of the town.

NOW, with his appearance reasonably changed, he dared look for sanctuary for the night—and a place where he could study at leisure the two magazines in his pocket. He had an idea those were going to be the most interesting magazines he'd ever read.

He walked in the direction opposite that of the drugstore where disaster had so nearly befallen him. He passed a man's haberdashery, a sporting goods store, a theater at which was playing a picture he had seen in New York two months before. Everything seemed normal and ordinary. The people about him were normal and ordinary. For a moment, he wondered if—



The beauty of the ringed planet—and its tremendous size—made Keith catch his breath (CHAP. XIII)

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Then he came to a newsstand with a rack of newspapers in front of it. The headline read:

ARCS ATTACK MARS; DESTROY KAPI

Earth Colony Unprepared

Dopelle Vows Vengeance

He stepped closer to read the date. It was today's issue of the *New York Times*, as familiar typographically as the palm of his hand. He picked the top copy off the rack and went into the store with it. He handed the newsdealer a hundred credit note and got ninety-nine credits in change—all in bills like the ones he had except in smaller denominations. He stuffed the paper in his pocket and hurried out.

A few doors farther on was a hotel. He checked in, signing—after a second's hesitation while he picked up the pen—his right name and address. There wasn't any bellhop. The clerk handed him the key and told him where to find the room, at the end of the corridor on the second floor.

Two minutes later, with the door closed and locked behind him, he took a deep breath of relief and sat down on the bed. For the first time since whatever had happened in the drugstore he felt safe.

He took the newspaper and the magazines from his pocket, then got up again to hang his coat and hat on the hanger inside the door. As he did so, he noticed two knobs and a dial on the wall beside the doorway, above a six inch circular area of cloth—obviously a built-in radio with the cloth covering a speaker outlet.

He turned the knob that looked like a rheostat and it was. A faint hum responded immediately. He turned the tuning dial until a station came in clear and strong, then turned down the volume a little. It was good music—sounded like Benny Goodman, although he didn't recognize the tune.

He went back to the bed, took off his shoes to be comfortable and propped pillows up against the head of the bed. He picked up, first, his own book, *Surprising Stories*. He stared again, with growing wonder, at the cover—incredibly the same picture, incredibly different.

He opened it quickly to the contents page and didn't even glance at the table of contents until he read the statement of ownership. *That* was what came first.

. . . Borden Publications, Inc. . . . L. A. Borden, Editor and Publisher. Keith Winton, Managing Editor.

He found he'd been holding his breath a little. He belonged here then (wherever *here* was) and he still had a job. And Mr. Borden too—but what had happened to Borden's country estate, the estate that had literally fallen out from under him?

Another thought struck him, and he grabbed up the love story book and almost tore it getting it open to the contents page. Yes—Betty Hadley was Managing Editor.

It still read Whaley Publishing Co., of course. This issue was before Borden had bought the magazine.

Whatever mad universe this was, he had a job here and Betty Hadley was here.

He sighed a little with relief. Betty Hadley—this couldn't be too bad a place.

The tune on the radio stopped suddenly, as though someone had shut off a record. A voice cut in:

"Special news bulletin. Second warning to citizens of Greeneville and surrounding territory. The Arcturian spy reported half an hour ago has not yet been apprehended. All railway stations and spaceports are being closely guarded and a house-to-house search is being instituted. All citizens are requested to be on the alert.

"Go armed. Shoot on sight. Mistakes may be made but again we remind you that it is better that a hundred innocent people die than that the spy escape to cause the loss, perhaps, of a million Terrestrial lives.

"We repeat the description . . ."

SCARCELY breathing, Keith Winton listened to that description. About five feet nine . . . one-sixty pounds . . . tan suit, white sport shirt open at the collar . . .

He let his breath out slowly. They hadn't discovered his change of clothes then. And there was no mention of his being wounded. The druggist, then, didn't know that one of the shots he'd fired had hit.

The physical description was fairly close but that couldn't be too dangerous if they didn't know the clothes he was wearing now or the fact that his upper arm would be bandaged. If only the man whose room he had burgled at the rooming house didn't come home and find the dark suit missing,

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and tie it in with the broadcasts—

But—ye gods, what had he walked into? *"Shoot on sight!"*

At least that ended but definitely his half-formed intention to go to the police with the truth as soon as he'd oriented himself a bit. Somehow, he was in deadly danger here and there wouldn't be any chance to explain. Somehow he'd have to get back to New York, and—but what would New York be like? As he knew it or otherwise?

It was getting hot and stuffy in the room. He went over to the window and opened it, then stood looking out at the street below. So ordinary a street, such ordinary people. And then three of the tall purple monsters, arm in arm, came out of the theater lobby across the way and nobody on the street paid any attention to them.

He stepped back suddenly from the window, for one of the purple things might, for all he knew, be the one that had seen him in the drugstore; they all looked alike to him but it might recognize him if it saw him at the window.

He was trembling a little at a sudden thought. Was he crazy? If so, it was the craziest form of craziness he'd ever heard of and he'd studied abnormal psychology at college. And, if he were crazy, which was the delusion—this world he'd just discovered or his memories of a world without space travel and purple Bems?

Were all his memories wrong? Or—*what?*

There were footsteps along the corridor outside his door, footsteps of three or four people.

There was a knock at his door. A voice said, "Police."

CHAPTER IV

Manhattan Madness

KEITH took a deep breath and thought fast. The radio had just told him that a house-to-house search was being made. probably that's all this was. As someone who'd just checked into the hotel he'd be investigated first, of course. Aside from his time of checking in, they could have no grounds for suspicion.

Was there anything on him that would give him away if he were searched? His money—money that was in dollars and cents instead of credits. That was all. Quickly he took from his pocket the change he had left—a quarter, two dimes and some pennies. From his billfold he took the bills—three tens and some singles—that weren't credit bills. He wrapped the change in the bills, making a small tight wad, and reached out through the window, putting them on the corner of the window ledge out of sight.

Then he went and opened the door of the room.

Three men, two of them in police uniform, stood there. The uniformed ones held drawn revolvers in their hands. It was the other, the man in a gray business suit, who spoke.

He said, "Sorry, sir. We're making a routine check-up. You've heard the broadcasts?"

"Of course," Keith said. "Come in."

They came in, ready and alert. The muzzles of the pistols were aimed at his chest and they didn't waver a bit. The cold suspicious eyes of the man in gray didn't waver from his face either. But his voice was polite. "Your name?"

"Keith Winton."

"Occupation?"

"Editor. Managing Editor, that is, of *Surprising Stories.*" Keith gestured casually at the magazine lying on the bed.

The muzzle of one of the revolvers dropped a little and a broad grin came across the face of the man behind it.

"The heck!" said the uniformed man. "Then you run the Rocketalk Department, don't you? You're The Rocketeer?"

Keith nodded.

"Then maybe you remember my name? John Garrett. I've written you some letters and you published two of them." Quickly he transfered his pistol to his left hand and stuck out his right.

Keith shook it. "Sure," he said. "You're the guy who keeps trying to talk us into running color on our inside illustrations, even if we have to raise the price a d—" He caught himself quickly. "—a credit."

The man's grin got broader and his pistol dropped to his side. "Sure," he said. "That's me. I've been a fan of your magazine ever since—"

The man in gray cleared his throat. He said, "That'll do, Sergeant. We're on business, remember?"

But his attitude was more relaxed as he

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smiled at Keith, and some of the stiffness had gone out of his face and voice. "Guess you're all right, Mr. Winton. But, as routine, do you have identification?"

Keith nodded and started to reach for the wallet in his hip pocket, but the man in gray said, "Wait. If you don't mind—"

And, whether Keith minded or not, he stepped around behind Keith and ran his hands swiftly over all of Keith's pockets, ending by removing the wallet himself, glancing inside it and then handing it back.

"Okay," he said, "if—"

He went to the closet, opened the door and looked inside. He opened the dresser drawers, looked under the bed, made a quick but reasonably thorough search.

"You have no luggage?"

Keith said, "Didn't expect to stay here overnight. Came on business and it took me longer than I expected."

THE man in gray finished his search. He said, "Sorry to have bothered you, Mr. Winton. By the way, I'm Captain Hoffman. If there's anything I can do for you—you're going back to New York tomorrow morning?"

Keith had been thinking about that. Sometime tonight the man whose suit he was wearing was going to discover it was missing and possibly report it to the police. It might be better if he could run the gauntlet of the railroad station now, while things looked good.

He said, "I've been thinking about that, Captain. Going back in the morning, I mean. It'll get me in at the office so late; I think I'm going to change my mind and go back tonight. I was tired when I decided to stay over here but I'm feeling better now. Will I have any trouble at the station?"

"Possibly. They're screening pretty close at all the outlets. I'll write you a note if you like."

"Fine," Keith told him. "I'll appreciate it."

Half an hour later, he was on an uncrowded train to New York. He had a seat to himself and two hours of leisure to read the two magazines and the newspaper he had bought.

The newspaper came first.

ARCS ATTACK MARS; DESTROY KAPI

That was the news, the big news. He read it carefully. Kapi, it seemed, was an Earth colony on Mars established in 1939, the fourth of the seven colonies established there. It was smaller than most of the others. There had been eight hundred and forty Terrestrial colonists. All had been killed as well as an estimated hundred and fifty Martian laborers.

Then, Keith realized, there must be Martians as distinguished from Terrestrial emigrants. What were they like? There wasn't any clue in the news article. Were they Bems—bug-eyed monsters like the purple beings from the Moon?

He read on. A single ship of Arcturians had somehow got through the cordon of spaceguards, and had launched a single torpedo before the Dopelle fighters had detected it. They had attacked at once and, although the Arcturian vessel had switched to interstellar flight, they had pursued and destroyed it.

Preparations were being made for a counter-raid. The details were, of course, a military secret.

There were a lot of names and things that meant nothing to him. Somehow it struck him strangely when he came across a familiar one—General Dwight D. Eisenhower, for example, in charge of Venus Sector.

Then there were words and references that puzzled him—the phrase "all-city mist-out" and frequent references to "the renegades" and "the Nighters."

He went through the paper from first page to last, hunting clues to the differences between this world and the one he knew. There seemed to be so amazingly little difference on the domestic scene—so amazingly great a difference on the cosmic scale.

The society news was there, the sport news—St. Louis was leading one major league and New York the other—and the ads were the same except that prices were given in credits instead of dollars. But basically the same merchandise was offered—no slightly-used space ships, no Little Wonder Atomic Kits for the kiddies.

He studied the want-ads particularly. The housing situation seemed a bit better than he remembered it—occasionally a flat or house was offered for sale with the comment, "Emigrating to Mars," and one Pets for Sale ad offered a Venus coline and another a moon-pup.

It was one o'clock when his train pulled into Grand Central. There were the usual

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lights in the station, Keith noticed as he got off the train but there was something different otherwise in the atmosphere of the station —something he couldn't quite put his finger on. He realized, too, as he walked along with others down the long walk between the tracks to the main hall of the station, that the train had not been crowded. His car had been only a third filled.

There weren't any other trains unloading and all the redcaps seemed to have gone. Just ahead of Keith, a little man was struggling to carry three suitcases, one in each hand and one under his arm. He was having heavy going.

"Give you a hand with one of those?" Keith asked.

The little man said, "Sure—thanks," with real gratitude in his voice as he relinquished one of the suitcases. A twinge in Keith's left shoulder reminded him in time not to take the suitcase with his left hand.

He moved around to the right side of the little fellow and said casually, "Not much traffic tonight, is there?"

"That was the last train in, I guess. Shouldn't really run 'em *that* late. What's the use of getting in if you can't go home? Oh, sure, you got a better start in the morning, but—"

Keith said, "Sure," and wondered what they were talking about.

"Eighty-seven killed last night!" the little man said. "Sixty-some the night before. Just in New York and that's just the ones killed outright. Heaven knows how many got dragged down alleys and beat up but not killed." He sighed. "I remember when it was safe even on Broadway."

HE STOPPED suddenly and put down the suitcases. "Got to rest a minute," he said. "If you want to go on just leave that other one." He flexed his hands, cramped from the handles of the suitcases.

"No hurry," Keith said. He was casting about in his mind for ways in which he could ask questions without arousing suspicion. "Uh—I haven't heard a newscast for a while. Have you? Anything new?"

"Arcturian spy in the country. That was on early in the evening. That's worse news than Kapi." He shuddered slightly.

Keith nodded. "Haven't heard a newscast but I heard someone mention that. What's it about? I mean, how do they know there's one loose, if they didn't catch him?"

"*Catch* him? Lord, mister, you don't *catch* Arcturians; you kill 'em. But this one got away. Upstate in Greeneville. Tried to sell somebody some banned coinage and one of the coins was one of the Arc counterfeits, one of the wrong-dated ones."

"Oh," Keith said. It *had* been the coin, then. He'd felt pretty sure of it. He'd have to watch the rest of those coins he had. Maybe it would be smarter to get rid of them as soon as he could, down the nearest sewer. It would be so easy to forget and hand one to someone when he bought something small, instead of one of the credit bills.

Right now the coins, wrapped tightly in his dollar currency so they wouldn't rattle, made a hard and suddenly uncomfortable lump in his right trouser pocket. Maybe, he thought, he should have left them on the windowsill of his hotel room in Greeneville instead of recovering them, as he had, by pretending to lean out the window for a look around before he closed it and left the room with the Greeneville policemen.

No, that might have been dangerous, too. If he'd left them and they'd been found—

[*Turn page*]

HEADACHE
RELIEF!
UPSET STOMACH
JUMPY NERVES
THANKS TO FAMOUS BROMO-SELTZER
Millions turn to Bromo-Seltzer to relieve ordinary headache three ways. It's famous for giving fast, pleasant help. Caution: Use only as directed. Get Bromo-Seltzer at your drugstore fountain or counter today. A product of Emerson Drug Co. since 1887.
BROMO SELTZER

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well, they'd seen his name in his wallet; there'd be a tie-in between Keith Winton and the Arcturian spy they were looking for. And then the New York police would be looking for Keith Winton. Yes, it was well that he'd recovered them temporarily.

The little man flexed his hands again and picked up the two suitcases. "Guess I can make it the rest of the way," he said. "If you're ready—"

Keith picked up the other suitcase and they started along the tracks again toward the station lobby.

"Hope there are cots left," the little man said.

Keith opened his mouth and shut it again. Any question he asked might give him away—if it were a question to which he should know the answer without asking. He said, "Probably won't be," in a humorously pessimistic voice that could be taken as a joke if it was the wrong thing to say.

They were nearing the lobby now and a redcap came toward them. The little man sighed with relief and put down the suitcases and Keith handed over the one he'd been carrying.

"Cots?" the redcap asked them. "A few left."

"Yes," Keith's companion said. "For me, anyway." He turned to Keith. "You're not—uh—"

"Thanks, no," Keith said. "Think I'd better get home."

The little man shook his head slowly and sadly. "Too much of a chance for *me* to take. I'd rather be sure of seeing tomorrow. Well—good luck and thanks for the lift with that suitcase."

"Don't mention it," Keith said.

They were walking through now into the main lobby of the station. Keith almost stumbled.

There were army-type cots as far as he could see, in neat orderly rows in the dimly lighted lobby. On most of the cots people lay asleep.

Could the housing situation be *this* desperate? he wondered. No, it couldn't be that, not for the number of for-rent ads in the newspaper in his pocket. But what then? Why else were thousands of people sleeping uncomfortably and unprivately in Grand Central station?

If only there were some way he could ask questions without drawing attention and suspicion.

He threaded his way through the dimness, walking as quietly as he could so as not to awake the sleepers he passed, heading for the 42nd Street entrance. As he neared it he saw there were two policemen posted at each of the doors.

But he couldn't stop now. The ones he was approaching had seen him coming and were watching him. He tried to walk past them casually. He noticed now that the glass panels of the doors had been painted black on the outside.

The bigger of the two policemen spoke as Keith reached for the door to open it. But his voice was courteous, respectful—even, Keith thought, a little awed.

"Are you armed, sir?" he asked.

"No."

"It's pretty dangerous out there," the policeman said. "We haven't the authority to make you stay, but we advice it."

DANGER! Was it some danger of which he knew nothing that kept these thousands of people, the late arrivals on the last trains from here and there, inside the station? What had happened to New York? But it was too late for him to back down now. Besides, he thought grimly, he was in danger *anywhere* until he knew the score and the ropes a lot better than he did.

He said as casually as he could, "Haven't far to go. I'll be all right."

"It's your business," said one of the cops. And the other grinned. "We hope it ain't your funeral. Okay, mister." He opened the door.

Keith almost stepped back. It hadn't been black paint on the outside of the panes. It had been—blackness. A kind of utter black darkness he'd never seen before. Not a glimmer of light showed anywhere. The dimmed lights inside the station didn't seem to cut into that blackness at all. Looking down, he could see the paving of the walk for only a foot or two beyond the edge of the open doorway.

And—was it his imagination, or was a little of that outside blackness drifting into the station itself, through the open door, as though it weren't darkness at all but a palpable blackness, a mist, a pall?

But he couldn't admit—whatever was out there—that he hadn't *known* about it. He had to go through that open doorway now, whatever it led to.

He walked through and the door closed be-

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hind him. It had been like walking into a closet. This was a blackout beyond blackouts. It must be—he remembered that phrase—"the mist-out," one of the many things he'd wondered about while reading the newspaper. *This* must be it.

He looked up, and there wasn't a sign of moon or star—and it had been, in Greeneville at least, a bright clear night. Yes, undoubtedly this wasn't darkness. It was a black mist.

Reaching out to touch the building and trailing his hand along it as he walked, groping with his free hand before him, he started walking west, toward the Vanderbilt Avenue corner. He kept his eyes open, straining against the black, but he might as well have closed them for all the good they did him. He knew now how a blind man felt. A cane, to tap ahead of him on the invisible sidewalk, would have been welcome.

Why hadn't he followed the little man's lead and taken a cot in the station?

His trailing hand encountered emptiness, the corner of the building. He paused a moment, wondering if he should go on at all. He couldn't go back into the station but why not just sit down here on the walk, his back to the building, and wait for morning—if morning *did* bring dissipation of the black mist?

Certainly getting to his bachelor apartment down in the Village was out of the question. Taxicabs *couldn't* be running. He had a hunch no other form of transportation would be running either. Only fools like himself would even be trying to get anywhere in soup like this.

But he decided against the sidewalk. There might be police patrols that would question him, wondering why he was outside the sanctuary of the station.

Now with only his shuffling feet to guide him, he made his way to the curb and out into the street. If there was any traffic—but there *couldn't* be.

He found the curb on the far side by falling over it, shuffled across the sidewalk and again was able to touch solidity with a guiding right hand as he groped along 42nd Street. Forty-second Street, only a few blocks from Broadway and Times Square, and he might as well have been in the deepest, darkest forest of Africa. There wasn't a sound, either.

Except the soft shuffle of his own footsteps and he realized that, for no conscious reason, he was walking on tiptoe to disturb that awful quiet as little as possible. He traversed the short block to Madison, crossed it, and began to grope his way toward Fifth Avenue. Where *was* he going?

Well, why not Times Square? Unless he just sat down in the open, he had to be going somewhere and why not to the center of things? If there was anything going on in New York at all it would be there. And if Times Square were as bad as this he'd see if the subways were open. It might be light down in the subway stations—as in Grand Central—even if the trains weren't running.

Anywhere, out of this blackness.

He'd been trying every door he'd passed. They were all locked. He thought of the Borden Publishing Co. office, only three blocks south—and he had the key to it. But no, the outer door of the building would be locked. All these other buildings he'd been passing were locked.

He crossed Fifth Avenue. Across the street from him now would be the Public Library. For a moment he thought of going to it, and spending the night on the steps there. He'd try Times Square and the subway first.

He tried another door—locked, as had been all the others—but in the brief instant when his footsteps paused as his hand tried the knob, a soft sound came to his ears. The sound of footsteps approaching him from the direction of Broadway. Footsteps that were even more soft and cautious than his own, stealthy footsteps. Something inside told him that there was danger in them, deadly danger.

CHAPTER V

The Nighters

AS HE stood still the footsteps came closer. Whoever, whatever it was—there wasn't any way of avoiding a meeting, unless he turned and worked his way back the way he had come. It was, it seemed to Keith suddenly, a one-dimensional world. There was only forward and backward in it as long as they each—he and the unknown—groped their way along the building fronts. Like ants crawling along a string they must meet and pass unless one of them turned.

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But before he made up his mind to turn it was already too late—a groping hand had touched him and a whining voice was saying, "Don't rob me, mister. I ain't got no money," and Keith sighed with relief.

"Okay," he said. "I'll stand still. You go around me."

"Sure."

Hands touched him lightly, and a strongly alcoholic breath almost made him gasp as the man groped past him.

There was a chuckle in the blackness. Just an old space dog on a spree," the voice said. "And rolled already. Look, mister, I'll give you a tip. The *Nighters* are out. A gang of twenty or thirty of 'em, over Times Square way. You better not keep on the way you're goin'."

The man was past him now. His hand still touched Keith's arm to maintain contact.

"They're the ones who robbed you?" Keith asked.

"Them? Mister, I'm *alive*, ain't I? Would I be if the Nighters had got me? I ask you."

"That's right," Keith said. "Maybe I'd better not go that way after all. Uh—are the subways open?"

"The *subways?* Man, you *really* want trouble, don't you?"

"Where *is* a safe place to go?" Keith asked.

"Safe? A long time since I heard that word. What's it mean?" A drunken laugh. "Mister, I was on the Mars-Jupe run in the days of the plat rush, when they said the last rites over us before they closed the air-locks. I'd as soon be back there as messing around this mist-out and playing tag with Nighters."

"How'd you know I wasn't a Nighter?"

"You kidding? How could one guy be a Nighter, when they go in armlock gangs and you can hear 'em tapping. We're fools to be out in this, mister. You and me, both of us. If I wasn't drunk—say, got a match?"

"Sure," Keith said. "Here's a box of them. Can you—?"

"I got the shakes, mister. Would you light one for me? And then, when I get a fag going, sure, I'll tell you a safe place we can hide out in for the rest of the night."

Keith scraped a match along the side of the box and struck it. The sudden flame made gray dimness out of the black mist for a radius of about a yard.

It revealed a hideous, leering, scarred face—and above it a club raised to strike. The club started to come down the instant the match flared.

There wasn't time to duck that blow. Keith stayed alive in that instant by reacting quickly, instantaneously. He stepped in under the blow, thrusting the flaming match into that ugly face. The man's forearm, not the club, struck Keith's head a glancing blow. The club dropped and struck the sidewalk.

Then they were struggling, wrestling in the dark, with strong hands trying for Keith's throat, foul breath in his face and fouler words in his ears. He managed to avoid those strangling hands. He stepped back and struck. His fist connected solidly in the dark.

He heard his assailant fall—not knocked out, for he was still cursing. Under cover of that sound, Keith took three light, quick steps backward, away from the wall, out into the open blackness, and stood there quietly, not making a sound.

He heard his attacker scramble to his feet, breathing hard. For half a minute, perhaps, that breathing was the only sound in the world. Then there was another sound, a new one. It was a distant, soft tapping, like the tapping of a blind man's cane, but faster and manifold—as though a company of blind men were coming tapping through the dark, fast. The sound came from the direction he had been going—from the direction of Broadway and Times Square.

He heard a subdued mutter, "Nighters!" and the quick shuffle of footsteps as his former assailant started off. His voice, no longer cursing or even belligerent, came back: *"Run,* pal. *Nighters!"*

And the shuffle and scuffle of his footsteps died away as the tapping got louder and nearer. It was getting nearer incredibly fast.

WHAT were Nighters? Human beings? He tried to piece together the few things he'd heard about them. What had the man with the scarred face said about them? "When they go in armlock gangs and you can hear 'em tapping."

A gang of murderous ("Them? Mister, I'm alive, ain't I? Would I be if the Nighters had got me? I ask you?") desperadoes organized to prey in the superblackness of the mist-out?

Armlock? A row of them with locked arms, perhaps, from one side of the street to the other, so their prey couldn't escape?

The tappings was close now, only yards away. Coming faster than men can walk in

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the dark, almost at a run. They had a system, somehow, that gave them speed.

Keith turned and ran, diagonally toward the line of the building fronts until his hand, outthrust, made scraping contact, and then along the buildings. Despite the risk of falling over some obstacle he couldn't see, he *ran*.

The danger behind seemed greater. The fear that had been in the voice of the man with the scarred face was contagious. That man—and he was no coward, however foul he was—had *known* what Nighters were, and he'd been afraid, plenty afraid.

Keith ran thirty or forty paces, then stopped to listen again. He'd gained. The tapping was farther off, maybe twenty yards away instead of five or ten. He could outdistance them then, as long as he dared to run. He went forward again, this time at a rapid walk for a counted twenty steps, and stopped again to listen. Yes, he'd held his distance even at that pace.

He started again, a little faster. He wanted to gain, not to stay even. Another twenty steps, again a pause to listen.

Tapping—from the opposite direction, *ahead of him.*

Quite a way ahead—he must be halfway down the block now. And that other sound could come from near the far corner—but definitely it was the same kind of sound as behind him, only more distant.

Two lines of them, coming from opposite directions, and he was in between. He stopped, his heart beating wildly now. He knew now what fear was. He could taste it in his throat.

The Nighters—whatever Nighters were—had him in the middle.

He stood there, hesitating, until the tappings behind him were so close he *had* to start running again—running toward the more distant danger to escape the closer one. Again, this time, he ran, blindly except for a hand trailing along the building fronts.

He ran about fifty paces before he stopped again to listen. There was the tapping from both directions now—and about equally distant either way. No use to run farther!

He crouched back into a doorway, caught. They'd have him within a minute now. Unless—

He groped for the handle of the door he leaned against, and tried to turn it. It was locked, of course. His frantic hands ran over the front of the door, felt the glass panel. In desperation he swung his fist at the bottom corner of the glass and it shattered.

He should have cut his fist badly, but he didn't. As though luck had decided to give him a break at last, a small area of glass fell neatly inward. He had a glimpse of light inside as a thick curtain drawn down over the pane swung inward. He reached through the opening, turned the knob from the inside, and stumbled through the door.

The light inside almost blinded him as he slammed the door shut behind him.

A voice said, "Stop or I'll shoot."

Keith stopped, partly raising his hands. He blinked and could see again. He was in the lobby of a small hotel. Across the desk, a dozen feet from him, leaned a white-faced, very frightened looking clerk, holding a repeating shotgun whose muzzle looked as big as a cannon and was aimed straight at Keith's chest.

He said, "Don't come a step closer. Get back out. I don't want to shoot you, but—"

Without lowering his half-raised arms, Keith said, "I can't. *Nighters.* They're—"

The clerk's face got whiter. They could both hear the sounds of tapping.

The clerk's voice was just above a whisper, and it trembled. "Back up against that door. Hold the curtain fast against the break, so no light shows."

KEITH took a step backward and leaned against the door.

He and the clerk were both very silent. Would they see—or, groping, feel—that hole he had made in the glass? Was a knife or a bullet or something going to come through that hole and into his back. His skin crawled.

But nothing came through the hole. For a minute there was tapping, muffled voices. Human voices? Keith thought so. Then the sounds outside died away.

Neither of them spoke for almost three minutes. Then the clerk said, "Now get out. They've gone."

Keith kept his voice pitched as low as he could and still make it audible to the clerk. He said, "They're still nearby; they'll get me if I go out again. I'm not a robber. I'm not armed. And I've got money. I'd like to pay for that window I broke—and I'd like to rent a room if you've got one. If you haven't a room, I'll even pay to sit in your lobby all night."

The clerk studied him uncertainly, without lowering the gun. Then he asked, "What

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were you doing—out there?"

"I came in from Greeneville—last train into Grand Central. I'd had word my brother was seriously sick and I took a chance on getting home—a dozen blocks. Hadn't realized quite how bad it was out there."

The clerk studied him closely. Finally he said, "Keep your hands up." He lowered the shotgun down to the counter, but kept his hand on it and his finger inside the trigger guard while, with his free hand he took a pistol out of a drawer behind the desk. "Turn around—your back toward me. I'll be sure you're *not* armed."

Keith turned and stood still while he heard the clerk come around the end of the counter. He stood even stiller while the business end of the pistol pressed into the small of his back and the clerk's hand ran over his pockets.

"Okay," the clerk said. "I guess you're all right; I'll take a chance. I *would* hate to send a dog out into—that."

Keith sighed with relief, and turned. "How much for the window, and a room?"

"A hundred creds will cover both. That rack of magazines and pocket books—give me a hand to put it in front of the door. It's high enough—it'll block off the break in the glass."

He took one end of the rack and Keith the other. The rack blocked off the door perfectly. Keith's eye was caught by the titles of some of those pocket books—one in particular. He noticed the price too—2½ cr. Apparently the rule of one credit to ten cents held pretty well.

And a hundred credits—ten dollars—for the pane of glass and a room for the night was reasonable enough. Not that he would have quarreled at a thousand credits, rather than go out again into the horror that was Forty-second Street.

He followed the clerk back to the desk and signed a registration card. He took a hundred-credit note and a fifty from his wallet. He said, "I'm going to pick out two or three of those pocket books to read. You keep the change."

"Sure, thanks. Here's your key. Three-o-seven—third floor front. You'll have to walk up and find it yourself. I've got to stay here on guard."

Keith nodded and pocketed the key. He walked quickly back to the book rack and picked a book called *Is the Mist-out Worth It? That* one, for sure.

His eye ran over the other titles. Some of them were familiar, others were not. H. G. Wells' *Outline of History*—he grabbed that one quickly. He could get a lot he needed to know out of that book. What for third choice? There was lots of fiction but he didn't want that. He wanted redder, more concentrated meat. *Dopelle, the Man, The Story of Dopelle, Dopelle, Hero of Spacewar.*

There were half a dozen books on Dopelle—and where had he heard that name before? Oh, sure—in the newspapers, the general in charge of Terrestrial space fleets. Well, if there were that many books about him out of only a few dozen titles, then maybe it would be well to skim through one of them. He picked *The Story of Dopelle*—it didn't even surprise him to notice that it was by Paul Gallico.

The walk up to the third floor told him how tired he was. His wounded shoulder was beginning to ache. So, for that matter, did the knuckles of his right hand. The glass had not cut them by a miracle but they were bruised and sore.

He found the room by the dim light in the hall, went in and turned on the light. It was a pleasant, comfortable room, with a nice soft bed that he looked at longingly. But he didn't dare get into it until he'd found out a few things he might learn from the books he'd bought in the lobby.

He undressed enough to be comfortable and sat down to read. First, *Is the Mist-out Worth It?* That one he was going to skim fast but he wanted to find out what the mist-out was. Luckily its history was fairly well summarized in the opening chapter.

THE mist-out, he learned, had been perfected by a German professor in 1934, shortly after the destruction—by Arcturian action—of Chicago and Rome. The destruction of Chicago—in which eight million people had died—had happened early in 1933.

Immediately, every large city in the world had enforced a strict blackout but, later in that same year, another Arcturian vessel slipped the cordon and Rome—perfectly blacked-out—had been destroyed. Fortunately, however, that particular Arcturian ship had been captured with a few members of the crew still alive.

Through the use of something or someone called Mekky—the author assumed that all of his readers knew all about Mekky, and failed to explain—it had been learned from

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the surviving Arcturians that they had detectors which picked up hitherto unknown rays —other than light rays—emitted by electrical incandescence.

They could thus locate a city through the lights burning within closed buildings, for the buildings were as transparent to the so-called epsilon rays as they were to radio waves.

For a while it seemed that the only safety for Earth's cities lay in going back to candles or gaslight for illumination at night. (Electric lights could be used for interior daylight lighting, for sunlight damped out the epsilon rays before they left the atmosphere.)

But Dopelle had retired to his laboratory and worked on the problem. From his findings of the nature of epsilon rays a German professor had worked out the epsilon gas which constituted the mist-outs which were now required by the Greater Earth Council for all cities larger than a hundred thousand population.

It was a substance of strange properties indeed. Odorless, harmless to life, it was impervious to light and to epsilon rays. Inexpensively made from coal tar, one plant could turn out enough in a few hours each evening to mix with the air and blanket a city completely. Sunlight disintegrated it at dawn in the space of a few minutes.

Other Arc ships had been through the cordon since then but no major city of Earth had been damaged. Undoubtedly the mist-out had saved many millions of lives. There was no sure way of knowing how many Earth cities would have been destroyed without it.

But it had taken lives too. Law enforcement agencies in many major cities had found themselves almost completely helpless to combat growing crime waves. Under cover of the mist-out, the streets of big cities had become no-man's-lands. In New York, for example, five thousand policemen had died.

The situation was aggravated by the strong tendency of combat veterans who had fought in space to turn to crime, a psychosis to which possibly a third of them succumbed. Finally, in many of the larger cities, attempts to maintain order at night had been abandoned.

Respectable citizens were simply warned to keep off the streets at night. Even the police stayed under cover from dusk to dawn and vicious gangs held sway. Some gangs, such as the Nighters of New York, the Bloodies of London and the Lennies (Keith wondered if the name came from Lenin's) in Moscow, had adopted specialized techniques and seemed fairly well organized.

Hundreds died nightly. The situation would have been worse except for the fact that the hoodlums killed and robbed one another more often than honest citizens, who stayed home.

The mist-out was, therefore, a big price to pay for immunity to space attack. Possibly a million people had died in the mist-out—but probably twenty to fifty million lives had been saved. The author pointed out the destruction by Arcturian ships of fifteen towns and small cities—too small to have mist-outs, too small to be not expendable—and reasoned, that except for the mist-outs, those fifteen flaming hells would have been cities of from a million to ten million people.

Keith shivered a little as he put down *Is the Mist-out Worth It?* If he'd bought that book in Greeneville he'd have known better than to have left Grand Central Station. He'd have taken a cot there or slept on the floor. Night life on Broadway wasn't what it had been where *he'd* come from.

He walked to the window and stood looking—well, not *out*, exactly, but at the blank blackness that was the pane. The curtain wasn't pulled down, but that didn't matter on any but a first floor window.

Six feet away, outside, one wouldn't be able to see the lighted window at all. It was an uncanny kind of blackness. And what was going on down below there on Forty-second Street, only a block and a half from the center of the universe?

Criminals taking over Forty-second Street! Spaceship runs to Mars, war with Arcturus. What mad universe was he in?

CHAPTER VI

The Sewing Machines Rampant

WELL, wherever, whatever it was, he was here and he was stuck with it and he was going to be in continuous danger until he learned the ropes well enough so that he wouldn't risk making a break every time he did or said anything.

Breaks weren't safe in a spot where you could get yourself shot on sight as a spy

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on no provocation at all, where you could get yourself killed by being foolish enough to try to walk from Grand Central Station to Times Square after dark.

Resolutely, he picked up the pocket edition of H. G. Wells' *Outline of History*. He was too tired to sit up any longer. He'd lie on the bed to read and, if he went to sleep—well, he'd finish reading in the morning and find out as much about things as he could before going out to face them.

He picked up the Wells book and started to read, skimming lightly through the early chapters. There was no difference in them. They even had the same pictures. He'd happened to reread the book recently and was familiar with it. The Egyptians, the Greeks, the Roman Empire, Charlemagne, Middle Ages, Renaissance, Columbus and America, the American Revolution, Civil War, the Industrial Revolution . . .

Into Space.

That was the chapter heading, nine-tenths of the way through. He quit skimming and leafing over pages and started to read.

Nineteen hundred and three. An American scientist at Harvard had discovered the spacewarp drive. Accidentally! Working on, of all things, his wife's sewing machine, which had been broken and discarded. He was trying to change it around so the treadle would run a tiny home-made generator to give him a high-frequency low-voltage current that he wanted to use in some class experiments in physics.

He'd finished his connections—fortunately he remembered afterwards just what they'd been and where he'd made his mistake—and he'd worked the treadle a few times when his foot stamped unexpectedly on the floor and he nearly fell forward out of his chair. The sewing machine, treadle and generator and all, just wasn't there any more.

The professor, Wells humorously pointed out, had been sober at the time but he quickly remedied that. After he sobered up he borrowed his wife's new sewing machine, and lost that. He didn't know where they were going.

He rigged up a third one and this time he got witnesses, including the president and the dean of the university. He didn't tell them what they were going to witness. He just told them to watch the sewing machine. They did and then the sewing machine wasn't there to watch.

They didn't know what they had, but they knew thay had something new. They relieved Professor Yarley (that was his name) of his teaching duties and gave him a grant to finance his experiments. He lost a few more sewing machines and then quit using sewing machines and began to get the thing down to the essential minima.

He found he could use a clockwork motor—connected that particular way—to the generator. The treadle wasn't necessary. He didn't have to use a bobbin but the shuttle was necessary and had to be of ferrous metal. And an electric motor running the generator canceled something out; it wouldn't work.

Foot-power through a treadle, hand power, clockwork or his son's toy steam engine. He got it down to a comparatively simple layout of stuff mounted on a box—boxes were cheaper than sewing machines—he'd wind a spring, release the lever and—well—it went *somewhere*.

Then one day there was a news story that something at first thought to be a meteor had struck the side of a tall building in Chicago. Upon subsequent examination it proved to be what was left of a wooden box and some oddly assorted clockwork and electrical apparatus.

Yarley took the next train to Chicago and identified his handiwork. He knew then that the thing moved through space and he had something to work on. Nobody had timed the striking of the object against the Chicago building to an exact second but, as nearly as he could get it timed, Yarley decided that the object had traveled from Harvard to Chicago in just about nothing flat.

The university gave him some assistants then and he began experimenting in earnest, sending out the things in considerable numbers, with identifying serial numbers on them and with an accurate record kept of variations in number of windings, the exact amount of power applied, the direction in which it had been facing and all such data. Also, he publicized what he was doing and got people watching for them all over the world.

Two were reported. By comparison with his records he learned some important things. First, that the machine traveled in the exact direction of the axle of the generator part—second, that there was a relationship between the number of windings and the distance it traveled.

Now he could really go to work. By 1904

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he had determined that the distance the machine traveled was proportionate to the cube of the number of turns or fractional turns on the generator and that the duration of the trip was actually and exactly nothing flat. By cutting the generators down to toy size he could send a machine for a comparatively short measured distance—a few miles—and make it land in a particular field outside of town.

IT MIGHT have revolutionized transportation in general, except that the machines were always damaged seriously, internally and externally, when they landed. Generally there was barely enough of them left for identification, not always that much. And it wasn't going to make much of a weapon; explosives sent never arrived. They must have exploded enroute, somewhere in the warp.

In three years of experimentation, they got it worked out to a nice formula and even began to understand the principles back of it as well as to be able to predict the results. They determined that the reason the things were destroyed was their sudden materialization, at the end of the journey, in *air*.

Air is pretty solid stuff. You can't displace a quantity of it in nothing flat without damaging whatever does the displacing—not only damaging it as an object, but damaging its very molecular structure.

Obviously, the only practical place to which an object could be sent was into space, open space. And, since the distance increased as the *cube* of the windings, it wouldn't take a very large machine to reach the moon, or even the planets.

Even interstellar travel would not take a really monstrous one, especially as the thing could be done in several hops, each taking no longer in time than it took the pilot to press a button.

Furthermore, since time was a zero factor, no trajectories need be calculated. Simply *aim* directly at a visible planet or the moon, adjust the distance factor, and there you were, materializing in space a safe distance from the planet and ready to descend and land.

How to land took them a few years to work out—the science of aerodynamics hadn't been solved yet and, anyway, there wasn't supposed to be any air on the Moon, the first and most obvious objective. But in 1910 the first man landed on the Moon and returned safely. The habitable planets were all reached within the next year.

The next chapter was *The Interplanetary War* but Keith Winton couldn't read it. It was three-thirty in the morning. He'd had a long day and things had happened to him. He simply couldn't hold his eyes open. He reached out and turned out the light and was asleep almost before his head dropped back on the pillow.

It was nearly noon when he awakened. He lay there for a moment before opening his eyes, thinking of the crazy dream he'd had about a world with space-travel and Bems and war with Arcturus. And mist-outs and—

He rolled over a little and his shoulder hurt so that he opened his eyes and saw an unfamiliar ceiling over his head. It was a shock, and it made him fully awake and he sat up in bed quickly. He looked at his wrist watch. Eleven forty-five! Rats, he was late for the office. Or was he?

He was horribly mixed up, unoriented. He got out of bed, and walked over to the window. Yes, he was on Forty-second Street, on the third floor, and there, across the street, was the Public Library. The street was filled with normal traffic and the sidewalks were crowded as ever, with ordinary-looking people wearing ordinary clothes. It was the New York he knew.

He stood there, puzzling, trying to fit his *being* here in New York into the scheme of things. The last thing he remembered that really made sense was his sitting in a chair in Mr. Borden's garden. After that—

Could he have come back to New York other than in the way he seemed to remember it—and have supplied, somehow, a nightmare for his memories of the trip? If so he was overdue to see a psychiatrist. Was he crazy? He must be. Yet *something* had happened to him yesterday. He put his hand to his shoulder gently and it was plenty sore under the bandage.

Well, he'd get out of here, go home and—well, he couldn't plan any further than that just yet. He'd go home first.

He turned around and walked to the chair where he had put his shirt and trousers. Something on the floor beside the bed caught his eye. It was a copy of H. G. Wells' *Outline of History*.

His hands trembled a little as he picked it up and opened it to the contents page.

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That would be the quickest. The third last chapter was *Into Space*, the second last *The Interplanetary War* and the last chapter *Struggle Against Arcturus*.

The book dropped out of his hand. He reached to pick it up and saw another one slid slightly under the bed. It was called, *Is the Mist-out Worth It?*

He sat down in the chair and didn't do anything for a few minutes except to think, to adjust his mind to the fact that whatever had happened had *really* happened. The mist-out last night with its jungle savagery, the—

He reached back for his trouser pocket and got his wallet. There were credit bills in it and not dollars. A little over a thousand credits, which would be a little over a hundred dollars.

SLOWLY he dressed and walked back over to the window. It was still Forty-second Street and still ordinary but it didn't fool him now. He remembered what it had been like at one o'clock last night and shuddered a little.

He caught a flash of purple in the crowd below and across the street and looked closer. It was a purple Bem, all right, walking into the library—and nobody was paying any more attention to it than they would have paid to a bank clerk or an insurance salesman.

He sighed deeply, put the H. G. Wells pocket book and the Paul Gallico one on Dopelle into his coat pockets and decided to leave the one about the mist-out. He knew all he really had to know about the mist-out—stay indoors out of it.

He went downstairs and out through the lobby. A different clerk was on duty at the desk and didn' even glance at him.

Now that he was fully awake he was hungry. Eating was the first order of business. He hadn't eaten since noon yesterday.

A quiet little restaurant a few doors west looked inviting. Keith went in and sat at a little table along one side. He studied the menu. There was a choice of a dozen entrées, and nine of them were familiar. The other three were the most expensive items—Martian *zot a la Marseille*, roast *krail* with *kapi* sauce and *gallina de luna*.

That last, if Keith remembered his Spanish, would be moon chicken. Some day, he decided, he was going to eat moon chicken, Martian *zot* and roast *krail* but right now he was too hungry to experiment. He ordered goulash.

Goulash didn't require concentration and, while he ate, he skimmed through the final two chapters of Wells. Wells was bitter about the so-called interplanetary war. He saw it purely as a war of conquest with Earth the aggressor.

The inhabitants of the Moon and of Venus had proved friendly and exploitable—and had been exploited. The intelligence of the lunans (yes, they were the purple Bems) was about that of an African savage of Earth but they were much more docile. They made excellent laborers and still better mechanics, once they had been introduced to the mysteries of machinery.

The Venusians, although almost as intelligent as Earthmen, were creatures of a quite different order. Interested solely in philosophy, the arts and abstract mathematics, they had welcomed the Earthmen, avid for exchange of cultures and ideas. They had no practical civilization, no cities (or even houses), no possessions, machines or weapons.

Few in number, they were nomads who—aside from the life of the mind—lived as primitively as animals. They offered no barrier and every assistance—aside from work—to man's colonization and exploitation of Venus. Earth had established four colonies there, aggregating a little short of a million people.

But Mars had been different.

The Martians had the silly idea that they didn't *want* to be colonized. They had, it turned out, a civilization at least equal to ours, except that they had not yet developed space travel (which, after all, had been an accidental discovery on Earth—if it hadn't been for the Professor's sewing machine the space warp principle might not have been discovered, mathematically, for a millenium).

The Martians had greeted the first arrivals from Earth gravely and courteously (the Martians did everything gravely; they had no sense of humor) and suggested they return home and stay there. They'd shot the second arrivals and the third.

And, although they'd captured the space ships in which these parties had arrived, they'd not bothered to use or copy the machines. They had no desire to leave Mars, ever. In fact, Wells pointed out, no Martian had ever left Mars alive even during the interplanetary war.

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A few, captured alive and put on Earth-bound ships for demonstration and study here, had willed themselves to death as soon as the ships had left the thin atmosphere of Mars. The same was true of Martian plants and animals. They could not or would not live anywhere else. No single specimen of Martian flora or fauna graced botanical gardens or zoos of Earth.

The so-called interplanetary wars, therefore, were fought entirely on the surface of Mars, and had been a bitter struggle in which the Martian population had been several times decimated. They had, however, capitulated short of annihilation and permitted colonization of Mars by Earthmen.

Only Earth and its moon, Venus and Mars had turned out to be inhabited by intelligent beings in the Solar System. Saturn supported plant life of a strange sort and a few of the moons of Jupiter bore plant life and wild animals.

Man met his match—an aggressive, colonizing race of intelligent beings—only when he went beyond the Solar System. The Arcturians had had the space drive for centuries. It was only by chance—for the universe is wide indeed—that they had not yet visited the Sun's planets. Having learned of us through an encounter near Proxima Centauri, they set about to remedy that omission.

The current war against Arcturus was, on Earth's part, a defensive war—although it involved such offensive tactics as we could muster. And thus far it had been a stalemate. Defensive tactics on both sides being more than adequate against known offenses. By fortunate early capture of a few Arc ships Earth had quickly overcome the technical handicap of a few centuries under which it had started the war.

Currently, thanks to the leadership of Dopelle, Earth had, in some ways, a slight advantage—although it was still a war of attrition.

Dopelle! That name again. Keith put down the H. G. Wells book, and started to take *The Story of Dopelle* out of his pocket when he realized that he had long since finished eating and was attracting curious glances just sitting there.

He paid for his meal and went out. The steps of the library across the street looked inviting. He could sit there and read some more. But there was his job to be considered.

Did he work for the Borden Publishing Co.—here and now—or didn't he? If he did, having missed a Monday morning might not be unforgivable. Missing a whole day might be. And it was well after one o'clock already.

He walked east and then south, to the office building in which—on the tenth floor—Borden Publications was located.

He took the elevator up.

CHAPTER VII

Mekky

THAT beautiful outer door was very familiar, one of those modern ones that look like nothing more than a sheet of glass with a futuristic chrome handle on it; you couldn't even see the hinges. The lettering *Borden Publications, Inc.* was just below eye height, small and chaste, in chrome letters suspended right inside the thick glass.

Keith took the handle very carefully so he wouldn't fingerprint that beautiful sheet of nothingness, opened the door and went in.

There were the same mahogany railing, the same pictures—hunting prints—on the walls and the same plump little Marion Blake with the same pouting red lips and upswept brunette hairdo, sitting at the same stenographer-receptionist desk back of the railing.

It gave him a funny little thrill to see her there—not because Marion herself could give him any thrill but because she was familiar. She was someone he *knew* and she was the first person he'd seen since—gosh, was it only since seven o'clock yesterday evening? It seemed like ages!

He'd seen familiar things and familiar places but not a familiar face. True, the address in the copy of *Surprising Stories* (at 2 cr.) had told him that Borden Publications was still here, but it wouldn't really have surprised him to find a purple Bem at Marion's reception desk.

For just a second, the familiar sight of her there, and the office being so completely usual, so completely as he remembered it, made him doubt his memory of the past eighteen hours.

It couldn't be, it simple *couldn't*—

Then Marion had turned and was looking up at him and there wasn't a trace of recognition in her face.

"Yes?" she asked, a bit impatiently.

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Keith cleared his throat. Was she kidding? Didn't she know him or was she just acting funny?

He cleared his throat again. "Is Mr. Keith Winton in? I'd like to speak to him, please." That could pass as a gag to counter hers; if she grinned now, he could grin back.

She said, "Mr. Winton has left for the day, sir."

"Uh—Mr. Borden. He in?"

"No, sir."

"Is Be—Miss Hadley in?"

"No, sir. Nearly everybody left at one. That's the regular closing this month."

"The regu—oh," he stopped himself in time before he could pull a boner by being incredulous about something he undoubtedly should know. "I forgot," he finished lamely. Why, he wondered, would one o'clock in the afternoon be the regular closing (she must mean the regular closing *time*) and why this month in particular?

"I'll be in tomorrow then," he said. "Uh—what would be the best time to catch Mr. Winton?"

"About seven."

"*Se—*" He caught himself starting to repeat incredulously again. Did she mean seven in the morning or in the evening? No, it couldn't be seven in the evening. It'd be almost time for the mist-out then.

Suddenly he guessed the answer and wondered why he hadn't thought of it sooner. The mist-out, of course—in a New York in which the streets were sudden death after dark, a New York without night life at all, the hours of work would *have* to be different in order to give employes any personal lives of their own at all.

It would change things completely when you had to be home before dark—probably well before, in order to assure safety. The working day would be from six or seven in the morning—an hour or so after early sunrise dissolved the mist—until one o'clock in the afternoon. And that would give people afternoons which would be the equivalent of evenings.

Of course—it would have to be that way. He wondered why he hadn't thought of it himself. Then Broadway wasn't dead, and there would still be shows and night clubs and dance halls and taverns—but their time to howl would be afternoons.

And everybody would be safely home in bed by, say, seven or eight and sleep until about four o'clock so they'd be up and dressed by dawn—and, of course, that's what she meant by one o'clock being the closing time *this month.*

It would have to vary somewhat according to the seasons, as the days shortened and lengthened. And probably regulated by local law, because Marion had expected him to know it, had looked surprised that he hadn't.

Marion, he noticed, was putting things into the drawer of her desk, getting ready to leave. She looked up again as though wondering why he was still there.

He said, "Isn't your name Blake—uh—Marion Blake?"

Her eyes widened a little. "Why, yes, but—"

"I thought I was remembering you." Keith was thinking fast, things he'd heard Marion say, girl friends he'd heard her mention, where she lived, what she did.

He said, "A girl named Estelle—I forget her last name—introduced us at a dance in—wasn't it Queens?" He laughed a little. "Isn't it funny I can't remember Estelle's last name but I remember both *your* names?"

SHE dimpled at him for that compliment. "Well, I live in Queens, and I guess you mean Estelle Rambow, but I don't remem—"

"I wouldn't have expected you to remember my name," Keith assured her. "It's—Karl Winston. And we danced just once that night. I remember, though, that you told me you worked for a magazine publisher but I didn't know that it was here. And you told me you wrote—poetry, wasn't it?"

"I wouldn't really call it poetry, Mr. Winston. Just verse, really."

"Call me Karl," Keith said, "since we're old friends, even if you don't remember it. You're leaving now?"

"Why, yes. I just had two letters to finish after one o'clock and Mr. Borden said if I'd finish them I could come in half an hour late tomorrow, and—"

"Good," he said. "I mean, I'm glad you were late. Will you have a drink with me?"

She hesitated. "Well—just a quick one, maybe. I've got to be home by two-thirty. I've got a date then."

"Fine," Keith said. And he meant it. Over one drink he could find out a few things he wanted to know and he didn't want to be stuck with Marion for the whole afternoon.

They took the elevator down and he let Marion choose the place, a little bar around

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the corner on Madison.

Over a pair of cocktails he said, "I think I mentioned to you that night that I'm a writer—doing feature stuff up to now. I've decided, though, to take a flyer at some pulp fiction. I've done a little of it, not much. But that's why I was up at your office. I wanted to find out just what kind of stuff they want right now, lengths and so on."

"Well, I think they're fairly well stocked on the detective stories. I guess Miss Bradley is looking for short lengths for her love book, and I understand they can use both short *and* long stuff for the adventure books."

"How about science-fiction? I think I'd be best at that."

Marion Blake looked up in surprise. "Oh, you've heard about that then?"

"About what?"

"That Borden's going to start a science-fiction magazine."

Keith opened his mouth, and closed it again. He thought, "I've got to remember not to be surprised whatever anyone says." So, in silence, as though thinking out an answer, he wondered why Borden would be starting *a* (not *another*) science-fic when he still had a copy of *Surprising Stories* with the Borden imprint in his pocket.

He said cautiously, "I did hear a rumor to that effect."

"It's true. They've got one issue dummied up. They'll start it as a quarterly with a fall issue. And they've filled only that first issue. They *are* looking for material beyond that."

Keith nodded and took a sip of his drink. Casually, he reached into his back pocket and took the folded copy of *Surprising Stories* from it—the copy he'd bought in Greeneville and hadn't yet read because he'd spent all his reading time first on a newspaper and then on *Is the Mist-out Worth It?* and H. G. Wells. Casually he put it down on the table to see what comment Marion might make about it.

She said, "Oh, I see you've been reading our top adventure book. Thinking of writing for that one, too?"

He said, "A guy named Keith Winton edits this one, I see. That's why I asked for him. Could you tell me something about him?"

"Why—what do you want to know?"

"Oh, anything to give me a line on him. What's he look like?"

Marion frowned a little. "He's tallish—a little taller than you—and slender. Dark. Wears shell-rimmed glasses. About thirty, I think. Serious-looking, kind of." She giggled a little. "Guess he's more serious than usual lately."

"Huh? Why?"

"I think he's in love," she said archly.

Keith managed a smile. "With you?"

"*Me?* He never even *sees* me. No, with our new love book editor. Not that it does him any good, of course."

Keith wanted to know why but that "of course" warned him off. When people said, "Of course," it meant you were already supposed to know. But how could he be supposed to know something about Betty Hadley, other than her name as editor of the love book mag? Still, if he could keep Marion talking —

"Kind of tough on him, huh?" he said.

"I'll say." Marion sighed deeply. "Gee, any girl in the world, I guess, would give her eye-teeth to trade places with Betty Hadley."

"Would you?"

"Would *I?* Are you kidding, Mr. Winston? To be fiancée of the greatest man in the world, the most handsome, the most romantic, the most—*golly!*"

"Oh," said Keith, a bit flatly in spite of himself. He gulped the rest of his drink and raised a finger to signal the waitress. He wondered who Betty's fiancée was. How, without revealing ignorance of something he ought to know, could he get his girl to keep on talking? He didn't have to.

"Gee," she murmured. "*Dopelle!*" It sounded almost like a prayer it was so reverent.

Well, he knew now. And anyway, he thought, she's only engaged, not married. Maybe there was a chance yet.

MARION BLAKE glanced at her wrist watch. "Got to go," she said. "Thanks for the drink, Mr. Winston. You'll be in at the office tomorrow?"

"Or the next day," Keith told her. He paid for the drinks and walked with Marion to the subway.

Then he headed for the public library and took a seat at one of the tables. He took the three publications he had left in his pockets out of them and put them on the table before him—the copies of *Surprising Stories* and *Perfect Love,* and Gallico's *The Story of Dopelle.*

He glanced at the latter bitterly. From the

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little he'd heard or read—little only because he'd *been* in this screwy place less than twenty-four hours—this mug Dopelle had it in his pocket. He was the hero of the whole solar system and, to top everything else, he had Betty Hadley, too. Darn the guy!

He picked up the pocket book and put it down again. Once he started it he wanted to read it through, and that would take all afternoon. There was a comparatively minor matter he could settle first—what had Marion Blake meant by saying that Borden was going to start *a* science-fiction book?

He picked up *Surprising Stories* and verified the Borden imprint on it and on the contents page. Borden *did* have a science-fiction magazine. He glanced down the table of contents, remembering the names of most of the writers, names almost as familiar as the name Keith Winton listed as managing editor in the fine type at the bottom. A few of the titles were familiar—they'd been in his own version of that issue.

He leafed through it, first glancing at the illustrations. They were better than his, definitely, even though some of the artists were the same ones. They were more vivid, had more action. The girls were more beautiful and the monsters more horrible.

He started reading one of the stories, the shortest one. He finished it, still vaguely puzzled although a light was beginning to dawn. He dipped into a few other stories, skimming—and suddenly he knew what Marion Blake had meant.

This *wasn't* a science-fiction book! They were mostly stories of the Arcturus-Sol war, although some were stories of adventure on Mars and Venus—but the backgrounds were consistent and the backgrounds fitted what little he'd heard and read of Mars and Venus and Arcturus and—

Well, these *were* adventure stories. It stunned him for a minute.

He smacked the book down on the table, drawing a reproving glance from a librarian.

But, he thought, there must *be* science-fiction books here or Borden wouldn't be starting one. But if these stories were fact what would be science-fiction be? Well, time-travel, for one thing and—what else didn't they have here? Well, he could read some science-fiction and find out.

He picked up the Dopelle book and stared at it bitterly again. *Dopelle!* He hated the guy. Anyway, now he knew how to pronounce his name, having heard Marion say it—it was pronounced as though it were French—Dough-PELL, with only two syllables and the accent on the second.

He sighed. That book came next, definitely, on his course of reading. But should he start it here and now? No. There were more important things to do and they all had to be done before dark. He had to find a place to stay and a way to make money to live.

He took out his wallet and counted what he had left out of the two thousand credits—the two hundred dollars approximately—the Greeneville druggist had given him. There was about half of it left. Enough maybe, to last him a week if he was careful—certainly not longer than that, since he'd have to buy himself some shirts and sox and a toothbrush and a razor and comb and heaven knows what else, starting from scratch.

Or did he, in this universe, still have a closet and a bureau full of clothes in a nice little two-room bachelor apartment down on Gresham Street in Greenwich Village? He considered the possibility and discarded it.

If this universe were equipped with a Keith Winton (who obviously didn't even resemble him) who had his job at Borden Publications, then this wasn't a universe with a neat hole for him to fit into, anywhere.

No, here and now he had to be Karl Winston and make a niche for himself—at least until he found out what it was all about. He'd be walking a tightrope for awhile too—one mistake and it would be too bad.

But *how, what, where?*

HE SHOVED those wonderings resolutely aside. There must be an answer, maybe even a way back. But survival came first and his mind must be free to plan and to plan intelligently. How could he parlay a hundred bucks worth of credits into a future?

He thought, and figured and planned. After awhile he went to the desk and borrowed paper and a pencil from the librarian. Returning to his table he began to make a list of things he'd need and its length appalled him. But, he thought, when he had it finished that he could do it for about forty dol—four hundred credits—he corrected himself—and have six hundred to live on for awhile.

Outside he saw with relief that some of the stores were still open—although it was three o'clock in the afternoon now.

He found a dime-store that was operating

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and started there, realizing that he couldn't afford to be fastidious about little things and things that wouldn't show. He started with a small cardboard suitcase, the cheapest he could find. He went on from there to socks and handkerchiefs and razor and toothbrush and on down the list.

Gauze bandage and an antiseptic for his shoulder—pencils and a ream of paper—the list seemed endless and, when he had added a few shirts from a cheap haberdashery shop, the suitcase was almost full.

He had the suit he was wearing sponged and pressed while he waited in a cubicle at the back of a cleaner's shop and he had his shoes shined.

His final purchase, and it left him almost exactly five hundred credits, was an armful of pulp magazines of various kinds. He took his time picking them out, especially for the purpose he had in mind.

It was while he was making that final purchase that the crowd must have gathered. When he came out of the drugstore where he'd bought the magazines the edge of the sidewalk was lined half a dozen deep and, from down the street a block or so, came the sound of wild cheering.

He hesitated a moment and then stood still, backed against the window of the drugstore. Whatever was coming he could see better there than by pushing up against the crowd at the curb.

Something or someone was coming. The cheering grew nearer. Keith saw that all traffic had stopped and pulled toward the curbs. Two policemen on motorcycles came along and behind them was a car with a uniformed man at the wheel.

There wasn't anyone in the back seat of the car but above it, floating in midair about ten feet above the car and keeping pace with it, was *something*. It was a round, featureless, blank metal sphere the size of a basketball.

The cheering grew as it came nearer. Keith stared, incredulous. Other people had backed up alongside him to see better.

He heard words now that were part of the cheers and recognized one of them. "Mekky! *Mekky*! MEKKY!" And someone beside him yelled, "Get the Arcs for us, Mekky!"

But over or under the cheering, Keith suddenly heard a voice that *wasn't* a cheering, yelling voice. It was a calm, clear voice that seemed to come from everywhere or nowhere.

"Very interesting, Keith Winton," it said. *"Come and see me some time."*

CHAPTER VIII

Advice from a Sphere

KEITH started violently and looked around him. No one near him was looking at him. But the suddenness with which he turned made the man to his right turn and stare.

"Did you hear that?" Keith demanded.

"Hear what?"

"Something about—about a Keith Winton?"

"You're crazy," the man said. His eyes left Keith's and went to the street again, and he yelled at the top of his voice, "Mekky! 'Ray for Mekky!"

Keith stumbled out from the building into the open area of walk between the crowd at the back of the sidewalk and the crowd at the curb. He tried to keep pace with the car and the thing that floated above it, the basketball-sized sphere. He had the strangest feeling that it was that *thing* which had spoken to him.

If so, it had called him by name and no one else had heard it. Now that he thought of it that voice hadn't seemed to come from outside at all. It had been inside his head. And it had been a flat, mechanical-sounding voice. It hadn't sounded like a human voice at all.

Was he going crazy? Or *was* he crazy?

But whatever the explanation, he had a blind impulse not to lose sight of—of whatever the basketball was. It had called him by name. Maybe it knew the answer to why he was here—to what had happened to the world as he, Keith Winton, knew it—to the world in which there'd been two world wars but no interplanetary ones, to the world in which he'd been editor of a science-fiction magazine which—*here*—was an adventure magazine and was edited by someone who had the name of Keith Winton but didn't even look like him.

Was the basketball-sized sphere Mekky?

Maybe Mekky had the answers. Mekky had said, *"Come and see me some time"!*

He stumbled into people, his suitcase banged legs, he drew sharp looks and sharp

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words—but he kept going, not quite keeping up with the pace of the car out in the street but not losing much ground either.

And the voice came inside his head again. *"Keith Winton,"* it said. *"Stop. Don't follow. You'll be sorry."*

Keith started to yell his answer. "Why? Who are—" and realized that, even over the cheering, people were hearing him and turning to stare.

"Don't attract attention," the voice said. *"Yes, I can read your thoughts. Yes, I am Mekky. Do as you have planned and see me later—three months from now."*

"Why?" Keith thought. "Why so long?"

"A crisis in the war," said the voice. *"The human race is at stake. The Arcturians can win. I have no time for you now."*

"What shall I do?"

"As you have planned," the voice said. *"And be careful. You are in danger every minute."*

Keith tried desperately to frame a question that would give him the answer he sought. "But what happened? Where am—"

"Later," said the voice. *"Later I will try to solve your problem. I perceive it through your mind but I do not know the answer yet."*

"Am I crazy?"

"No. And do not make one fatal mistake. This is real—it is not a figment of your imagination. Your danger here is real and if you are killed here you are very dead. I have no time now. Stop following."

Abruptly in Keith's mind, before he could again hear the sounds of cheering and the other noises, there was a sudden sensation of silence. Whatever had been in his mind had withdrawn. He knew that without knowing how he knew. He knew there wasn't any use framing another question there. There wouldn't be any answer.

Obedient to the last order he stopped walking. He stopped so suddenly that someone bumped into him from behind and snarled at him.

He caught his balance and stood staring down the street, over the heads of the crowd, at the sphere that was floating away from him, out of this life. What was it? What kept it up there? Was it *alive?* How could it have read his mind? And it seemed to know who he was, what his problem was—but not the answer.

He didn't want to let it go. Wait three months? Impossible when he could get the answer now! But he couldn't keep up with that car through the crowd while he was burdened with the suitcase and the armful of magazines. He looked about him wildly and saw that he was in front of a cigar store.

He darted in and put the suitcase and magazines down on a soft drink cooler near the entrance. He said, "Back in just a second. Thanks for watching these," and ran out again before the man could protest.

OUTSIDE again he could go faster. He held his ground half a block behind the car and the motorcycles and even gained a little. They turned south on Third Avenue, west—just around the corner—on Thirty-seventh Street. And there was a big crowd gathered there. The motorcycles and the car stopped at the edge of the crowd.

The sphere that had floated above the car didn't stop. It floated on and up, over the heads of the people. Up, up, to the open window.

It was Betty Hadley.

Keith Winton got to the edge of the crowd and stopped. No use pushing his way farther—he could see better here than closer in against the building. The cheering was tremendous.

Besides "Mekky," he heard "Dopelle" and "Betty" in with the cheers. The sphere floated up until it was level with the open window, beside Betty Hadley's shoulder. It paused there, hovering.

It spoke. This time, Keith knew instinctively, it was not speaking to him alone, as it had back there when it had first passed him. He knew somehow that the words he was hearing inside his head were echoing in the heads of all who stood there.

The cheering didn't even stop. It didn't have to, Keith realized. The words that formed inside his head, in that mechanical voice, were different in nature from the sounds that came through his ears. He could hear both at once and one didn't interfere with the other.

"Friends," said the voice, *"I leave you now to bear a message from my master Dopelle to Miss Hadley. A private message, of course. I thank you for the courtesy you have shown. And, from my master, these words to all of you—'The situation is still critical, and we must all do our best. But be of good cheer. There is hope for victory. We must win—we shall win.'"*

"Mekky!" the crowd roared. "Dopelle!"

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"Betty!" *"Victory!"* "Down With Arcturus!" "Mekky, *Mekky,* MEKKY!"

Betty Hadley, Keith saw, was smiling, her cheeks and throat flushed with embarrassment. Now she bowed once and withdrew her head and shoulders inside the window. The sphere floated in after her.

The crowd began to disperse.

Keith groaned. He tried to hurl a thought at the sphere but he knew it was too late. It wouldn't pay any attention to him if it heard him, if it received the thought.

Well, it had warned him. If it had been inside his mind it must have known that he loved Betty and it had warned him not to follow. It would have saved him the despair and bitterness that he was feeling now.

It hadn't meant much—not too much, that is—when Marion Blake had told him that Betty was engaged. As long as she wasn't actually married there was hope for him, he'd thought. He'd hoped he could make her forget this dope Dopelle. But—what a chance!

Far more than anything he'd read about that magnificent hero, the exhibition he'd just seen had made him realize what a romantic celebrity Dopelle must be! "My master Dopelle," the sphere had called him. And all New York was cheering him when he wasn't even there.

What a chance he, Keith Winton, had to take away the fiancée of a guy like that!

He walked back moodily to the cigar store where he'd left his suitcase and magazines and apologized to the clerk for the manner of his leaving them.

The streets were beginning to empty when he came out of the cigar store. He realized it must be getting near dusk and that he must find a place to stay.

He hunted until he found an inexpensive little hotel where—for a hundred and twenty credits in advance—he took a room for a week.

In his room he picked up one of the pulp magazines. Now for the plan—and the voice that had been Mekky, the sphere, had told him to go ahead with his plan.

For awhile, a long while, he couldn't really concentrate. Betty Hadley's face with its aura of blonde hair, its smooth creamy skin and kissable red lips, kept getting in the way. Why hadn't he had sense enough to obey the sphere's orders not to follow it—and get himself in a mood like this, just when he had to be able to think hardest.

Thinking of the hopelessness of his ever getting Betty made what he was doing seem futile and useless. But after awhile, in spite of himself, he began to get interested in the magazines. And he began to see that his plan was really possible.

Yes, he thought he could make a living for himself writing—for some of these magazines, at any rate. Five years earlier, before he'd started working for Borden, Keith had done quite a bit of free-lancing. He'd sold a number of stories and he'd written several that hadn't sold.

In fact, his batting average had been about fifty-fifty and—for a writer who wasn't too prolific, and who had difficulty plotting—that hadn't been too good. Besides, his stories hadn't come easily. He'd had to sweat them out painfully. So, when a steady job at a fairly good wage had been offered him, he'd quit writing.

BUT now, with five years of editing under his belt, he thought he could do better at it than he had before. He could see

[*Turn page*]

CAN YOUR SCALP PASS THE
FINGER-NAIL
TEST?
TRY IT! Scratch your head! If you find signs of dryness, loose ugly dandruff, you need Wildroot Cream-Oil hair tonic. Grooms hair . . . relieves dryness . . . removes loose dandruff!
YOUR HAIR CAN LOOK LIKE THIS WITH NEW
WILDROOT
CREAM-OIL
A LITTLE Wildroot Cream-Oil does a lot for your hair. Keeps your hair well groomed all day long. Leaves no trace of that greasy, plastered down look. Makes hair look and feel good.
CREAM-OIL CHARLIE SAYS: "IT CONTAINS LANOLIN!"
TUNE IN . . . "The Adventures of Sam Spade" Sunday evenings, CBS Network.
WILDROOT CREAM-OIL Hair Tonic

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now what a lot of his mistakes had been—laziness among them. And the laziness, at least, was curable.

Besides, this time he had plots to start with—the plots of all of the unsold stories he could remember. He thought he could do better with them now than he had five years ago, a lot better.

He went through magazine after magazine, skimming all the stories, reading some of them. It got dark and the black blankness of the mist-out pressed against the pane of his window but he kept reading.

One thing became increasingly obvious to him—he couldn't and didn't dare try to place stories in a setting with which he was as unfamiliar as he was with the world about him. He'd make mistakes, little mistakes, that would give him away, things that would show his unfamiliarity with the little details of life here.

Fortunately that left him two fields. From his reading of Wells' *Outline of History* he knew that the differences here all dated from those vanishing sewing machines of 1903. On any story—adventure, love or what have you—written as a costume piece and placed before 1903, he was on sure ground. Luckily, too, he'd been a history major at college and was pretty familiar with the subject—particularly American history.

He noticed with satisfaction that the love and adventure magazines both carried a fair percentage of costume pieces—more than the love and adventure magazines of where he'd come from. Possibly because there was a wider difference here between life of a hundred or two hundred years ago and life of today, the settings of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries seemed more romantic and interesting.

Even the love pulps—he was both surprised and satisfied to learn—carried historical stories, love tales put in Civil War, Revolutionary War and pioneer settings.

The other field he could tackle was, of course, pure fantasy. He'd bought only one fantasy magazine but he'd seen that there were others on the stands. And in pure fantasy—or semi-science-fiction adventures in far and non-existent galaxies—he couldn't go wrong. Nor in stories of the distant future. As long as he avoided the present, the recent past and the near future, he'd be all right.

He finished his study of the magazines by ten o'clock and, from then until midnight, he sat at the little desk in his room, pencil in hand and paper before him, jotting down notes of all the stories he could remember having written and not sold. He was able to remember twenty stories.

Of the twenty, six had been historical costum pieces and those were *in*—particularly the shorter ones that he could re-write comparatively quickly. Another six he picked out as being fairly easy to translate into historical or fantastic settings.

A dozen stories, then, to start on, as soon as he could get hold of a typewriter—if he could sell one or two of them quickly, he'd be all right. If not—well, there were still the coins in his pocket. A quarter had brought him two thousand credits in Greeneville. But he'd got himself into a jam. He wasn't going to take that risk again unless he had to—and then not without studying up on the subject and learning what the pitfalls were.

By midnight he was sleepy. But he hadn't finished all he wanted to do yet. He picked up *The Story of Dopelle* by Paul Gallico and started to read.

Now to find out what the competition really was—

CHAPTER IX

The Dope on Dopelle

THE competition, he learned within the next hour, was not only terrific. It was impossible.

Dopelle (he didn't seem to have a first name at all) was simply unbelievable. He was Napoleon and Alexander the Great and Einstein and Edison and Philo Vance and Galahad all rolled into one. And he was only twenty-seven years old.

The sketch of the first seventeen years of his life was brief. He'd been brilliant in school, skipped a lot of grades and had been graduated by Harvard (magna cum laude) at the age of seventeen, president of his class and the most popular man of his class despite his comparative youth.

Prodigies aren't usually popular, but Dopelle had been an exception. He hadn't been a grind. His high standing in his classes was due to his ability to remember perfectly everything he read or heard, obviating the necessity for hard study.

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Despite his heavy schedule of classes (he'd taken about everything Harvard had to offer) he'd had time to captain an undefeated and untied football team. He had worked his way through school (and become financially independent in the process) by writing, in his spare time, six adventure novels which had become best sellers at once and still rated as top classics in their field.

The wealth these books brought him enabled him to own his own private space-cruiser and his own laboratory where—during his last two years of college—he had already made several important improvements in the technique of space travel and space warfare.

That was Dopelle at the age of seventeen, just an ordinary young fellow. His career had started then.

He'd gone from Harvard to a Space Officers' Training School, emerged a lieutenant and had jumped grades rapidly for a year or so. At twenty-one he was in charge of counter-espionage, and was the only man who had successfully been to the Arcturian system and lived among the Arcs. Most Earthly knowledge of the Arcturians had been obtained by him on that trip.

He was an incredibly good space-pilot and fighter. Time and again his squadron had turned back Arcturian attacks with Dopelle spearheading as well as directing the fighting. The brass had begged him not to fight personally because his scientific knowledge was invaluable—but he fought anyway (by this time he was apparently above authority) and seemed to bear a charmed life. His bright red space-ship, the Vengeance, was never hit.

At twenty-three he was general of all the Solar forces but command seemed to be the least important of his activities. Except during times of crises he delegated authority and spent his time having exciting adventures in espionage and counter-espionage or in working in his secret laboratory on the Moon. The list of his scientific accomplishments in that laboratory was almost unbelievable.

The greatest of them, perhaps, was the creation of a mechanical brain, Mekky. Into Mekky Dopelle had put powers of thought not possessed by human beings. Mekky wasn't human but he (actually *it*, of course, Gallico pointed out, but nevertheless always referred to as *he*) was super-human.

Mekky could read minds—including Arcturian minds—and could perform thought-transference. Also he could solve (as an electronic calculating machine can solve) any problem, however difficult, given all the factors.

Into Mekky also was built the ability to transfer himself instantaneously through space without the necessity of having a space-ship to ride in. This made him invaluable as an emissary, enabling Dopelle, wherever he was, to keep in touch with his space fleets and with the governments of Earth.

Briefly and touchingly near the end of the book Gallico told of the romance between Dopelle and Betty Hadley. They were, it seemed, engaged, but had decided to wait until the end of the war to marry.

Meanwhile Miss Hadley continued to keep her job as editor of the world's most popular love story magazine, the job she had held when she and Dopelle had met while he was in New York incognito on an espionage job. They had fallen in love immediately and deeply. Now the whole world loved them and eagerly awaited the end of the war and the day of their marriage.

Keith Winton frowned as he put down the book. Could anything possibly be more hopeless than his loving Betty Hadley?

Somehow, it was the very hopelessness of things that gave him hope, a shred of hope. The cards just couldn't possibly be stacked that badly against him. There might be a catch somewhere.

It was after one o'clock when he undressed for bed but he phoned the desk of the hotel and left a call for six. Tomorrow was going to be a busy day. It had to be if he were to keep on eating after a week.

AND he went to sleep and dreamed—the poor goof—of Betty. Of Betty dressed (more or less) in one of the costumes worn by girls on the cover pictures of science-fiction magazines, being chased by a purple Bem.

Only he, Keith, was the purple Bem and he was thwarted when he almost caught Betty by a tall dashing romantic young man who had muscles of steel and who must be Dopelle, although he looked uncommonly like Errol Flynn.

Dopelle picked up the purple Bem that was Keith and said, "Back to Arcturus, spy!" and threw him out into space and he was spinning head over purple heels out among the planets and then among the stars. He was going so fast that there was a ringing sensation in his ears. The sound got louder

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and louder until he quit being a purple Bem and realized that the ringing was the telephone.

He answered it and a voice said, "Six o'clock, sir."

He didn't dare lie down again or he'd go to sleep, so he sat on the bed awhile, thinking, remembering the dream.

What *did* Dopelle look like? Like Errol Flynn, as he had dreamed? Why not?

If he ever saw Dopelle would it be any more improbable than anything else that Dopelle should look like Errol Flynn, or even *be* Errol Flynn? Wasn't this, maybe, a fantastic movie or a story or a book he'd tangled himself in?

Why not? Dopelle, he thought, was almost too perfect, almost too fantastic a character to be true. Good Lord, he sounded like something out of a—no, not out of a pulp magazine. As editor, Keith would have rejected any story which had so improbable a character. Like something out of a comic book, maybe.

But wait—hadn't the mechanical brain, Mekky, in brief contact with him, anticipated that very thought?

". . . do not make one fatal mistake. This is real. It is not a figment of your imagination. Your danger here is real—"

Mekky—fantastic as Mekky himself was—was right. This universe and the spot it had put him in were real enough—as real as his hunger for breakfast right now.

He dressed and went out. At six-thirty in the morning the streets of New York were as busy as—in that other universe he'd been in—they would have been at ten or eleven o'clock. The short day necessitated by the mist-out demanded an early start.

He bought a *Times* and read it while he ate breakfast. The big news story was, of course, the visit of Mekky to New York, and the reception that had been given him. There was a picture splashed over a quarter of the front page of the sphere poised in midair outside the open window and Betty Hadley leaning out of the window, bowing to the crowd below.

A boxed item of ten-point boldface type gave the words Mekky had spoken to the crowd, just as Keith had heard them there, inside his head. *"Friends, I leave you now to bear a message from my master Dopelle to—"*

Yes, word for word. And apparently that had been the only public statement from the mechanical brain. An hour later it had returned to "somewhere in space" as the news story put it.

He skimmed the rest of the paper. There was no news of the war—no mention of the crisis Mekky had said (privately to Keith) was impending in the war. If things were going badly, apparently it was being kept from the public. If Mekky had told him a military secret it must have been because Mekky realized that he was in no spot to spread it farther, even if he wished to.

An item on an inside page about a man being fined two thousand credits and costs for possession of a coin interested him. He read it carefully but didn't find any answer to the problem of why possession of coins was illegal. He made a mental note to look it up as soon as he had time. Not today—he had too much to do today.

First thing was to rent a typewriter. By taking a chance on using the name Keith Winton, for which he still had identification in his wallet, he got one without having to leave a deposit and took it to his room in the hotel.

He put in the hardest day's work he'd ever done in his life. At the end of it—he was dead tired by seven o'clock and had to quit then—he'd finished seven thousand words. A four thousand word story and a three thousand worder.

True, they were both rewrites of stories he'd written before, long ago, but he'd done a better job on them this time. One was a straight action story in a Civil War setting, the other a light romance set against the background of early pioneer days in Kansas.

He fell into bed, too sleepy to phone down to the desk and leave a call for in the morning.

BUT he awoke early, just after five o'clock. Back in his room after coffee and doughnuts, he read over the two stories and was more than satisfied with them. They were *good*. What had been wrong with them before hadn't been the plots—it had been the writing and the treatment and five years as an editor had taught him something after all.

He could make a living writing—he was sure of that now. Oh, he couldn't bat out two stories a day except while he was rewriting his old stuff from memory but he wouldn't have to. Once he'd rewritten the dozen or so stories he'd picked out he'd have

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a backlog. Two shorts or a novelet a week would be plenty once he'd used up his available old plots and had to think up new ones.

One more, he decided, and he'd start out to peddle them— And start, of course, with Borden Publications. They were good for quick checks if they liked the stories.

For his third rewrite job, he picked a science-fiction, remembering that Marion Blake had told him they were in the market for stuff for a new book in that field. He had one that wouldn't require any revamping at all—a time-travel story about a man who goes back to prehistoric times.

It was told from the point of view of the cave man who encounters the time-traveler and none of it was in a modern setting—so he couldn't go wrong.

He started batting the typewriter again and had it finished by nine o'clock.

Half an hour later he was smiling down at Marion Blake across the reception desk. She smiled back. "Yes, Mr. Winston?"

"Brought in three stories," he said proudly. "One I want to leave with Miss Hadley for her book and—who's running this new science-fiction book you told me was starting?"

"Keith Winton. Temporarily anyway. After it's really on the stands they may put someone else on it."

"Good, I'll want to see him too, then. And—I had a copy but I forgot to notice—who's running *War Adventure Stories?*"

"Keith Winton edits that, too. That and *Surprising Stories* are his regular books. I think he's free now. I'll see if he can talk to you. Miss Hadley's busy but maybe she'll be free by the time you've talked to Mr. Winton, Mr. Winston. Uh—your names are a lot alike, aren't they?"

"Almost a coincidence—same initial, too." He laughed. "Maybe he'll want me to use a different by-line if he buys the stories. He may figure some of his readers will think Karl Winston is a nom de plume of Keith Winton."

Marion Blake had pushed a plug into the switchboard and was talking into the mouthpiece. She pulled the plug. "He'll see you now," she said. "I—uh—told him you were a friend of mine."

"Thanks a lot."

After he'd started for Keith Winton's office he realized that he wasn't supposed to know the way until he was shown, but it was too late then, so he kept on going.

A moment later, Keith Winton sat down opposite Keith Winton, reached across the desk to shake hands and said, "I'm Karl Winston, Mr. Winton. Have a couple of stories to leave with you. Could have mailed them, of course but I thought I'd like to meet you while I was in New York."

Keith was studying Winton as he spoke. He wasn't a bad-looking guy, about Keith's age, an inch or so taller but a few pounds lighter.

His hair was darker and a little curlier. Facially, there wasn't any particular resemblance.

"You don't live in New York?"

"Yes and no," Keith said. "I mean, I haven't been, but I may be from now on. Been working on a paper in Boston—and doing a lot of free-lance feature writing on the side." He'd thought out his story and didn't have to hesitate. "Got a leave of absence for a while and—if I can make a go of things free-lancing here—I probably won't go back.

"I brought in two shorts I'd like you to consider—one for *War Adventure* and one for the new science-fiction book Miss Blake tells me you're starting. I'd appreciate a decision as quickly as I can get it—because I want to write some more I have planned along these lines and don't want to start until I know your reaction to these."

Keith Winton smiled. "I'll keep them out of the slushpile." He glanced at the upper right corners of the two manuscripts Keith had put on the desk.

"Three and four thousand. Those are lengths we need and both books you mentioned are wide open."

"Fine," Keith said. He decided to crowd his luck a little. "I happen to have an appointment in the building here on Friday, the day after tomorrow. Since I'll be so close, would that be too soon for me to drop in to see if you've made a decision?"

Keith Winton frowned a little. "Can't promise for sure that soon but I'll try. If you'll be in the building anyway drop in."

"Thanks a lot." Keith didn't crowd his luck any farther than that. He stood up. "I'll be in Friday then about this time. Goodbye, Mr. Winton."

He went back to Marion Blake's desk.

"Yes," she said, "Miss Hadley is free now. You may go in her office." This time Keith remembered to wait until she pointed out the proper door to him.

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HE FELT as though he were walking through thick molasses on the way to the door. He thought, "I shouldn't do this. It's crazy. I should have my head examined. I should leave the story for her—or take it to some other love story magazine editor."

He took a deep breath and opened the door.

And then he *knew* he should have stayed away. His heart did a double somersault when he saw her sitting there at her desk, looking up at him with a slight impersonal smile. She was twice as beautiful as he remembered. But of course that was silly—

Wait—*was* it silly? This was, somehow, another universe. It had a completely different Keith Winton in it.

Why shouldn't it have a completely different Betty Hadley?

Only she wasn't different really. She was just more beautiful. He couldn't tell exactly where the difference lay. It was as subtle as was the difference between the girls on the magazine covers back there and the ones on the covers here. They were the same girls in the same costumes but they had more—well, you name it.

It was like that with Betty—she was the same girl but subtly more beautiful and more desirable. He was twice as much in love with her.

Her smile faded and she said, "Yes?" Keith realized that he must have been staring.

He said, "My name is Kei—uh—Karl Winston, Miss Hadley. I—uh—"

She saw he was floundering and helped him out. "Miss Blake tells me you are a friend of hers and a writer. Won't you sit down, Mr. Winston?"

"Thanks," he said, taking the chair opposite her desk. "Yes, I brought in a story which . . ." And he went on talking, or rather his tongue did, now that he'd got it back, telling her substantially the same story he'd told Keith Winton.

But his mind wasn't on what he was saying at all.

And then, somehow, he was making his getaway without falling over his own feet and the interview was over and he was out of the door. And he knew he'd never again torture himself by coming that close to her again. Not that it wouldn't be worth the torture if there was a chance in a billion but there wasn't—there couldn't be.

He was so miserable that he almost walked blindly past the receptionist's desk without speaking but Marion Blake called out, "Oh, Mr. Winston."

He turned and managed to make himself smile. He said, "Thanks a lot, Miss Blake, for telling them—"

"Oh, don't mention that. That's all right. But I have a message for you from Mr. Winton."

"Huh? But I just talked to—"

"Yes, I know; he just left to keep an important appointment. But he said he wanted to ask you something and he'll be back by twelve-thirty and could you telephone him then?"

"Why, sure. I'll be glad to. And again, thanks a lot."

He started for the door, wondering what Keith Winton wanted to talk to him about so soon. He'd been in Betty Hadley's office less than fifteen minutes. Winton couldn't possibly have read even one of the two stories.

But—well, why wonder? He'd know when he phoned at half past twelve.

As he walked toward the elevators in the hallway outside Borden Publications, Inc., the door of one of the elevators slid open. Mr. and Mrs. L. A. Borden emerged and the door slid shut behind them.

Caught unaware, Keith nodded and spoke to them. Each of them nodded slightly and Mr. Borden murmured something inaudible, as one does when spoken to by someone whom one can't recall.

They went past him and into the offices he'd just left.

Keith frowned as he waited for a down elevator. Of course they didn't know him and he shouldn't have spoken. It was a very slight slip but he'd have to be on the alert to avoid even slight ones.

He'd made one back in Betty's office, too, when he'd started to introduce himself as Keith Winton instead of Karl Winston. And, now he thought of it Betty had given him a very peculiar look when he'd made that slip. Almost as though—but that was silly. He put the thought out of his mind.

It came to him again, as he walked into the elevator, that the similarities of this universe might be more dangerous to him than its differences, might make him give himself away more easily. He worried about it a little.

He'd have worried about it more if he'd known that he already had.

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CHAPTER X

Slade of the W. B. I.

KEITH WINTON didn't feel like going back to his hotel and grinding out another story just yet. This afternoon and evening, maybe. He had a good start with three stories but three stories, even fairly short ones and rewritten, are plenty for two days. He knew those stories were good and he wanted to keep up the quality and not go stale. The rest of today, then, he'd take off and wander around a bit.

Tomorrow, another story or two, so he'd have something to take in on Friday when he kept his appointments at Borden. It was funny, he thought, to be on the opposite side of the fence there—to be taking stories in instead of having writers and agents bring them. Maybe he should get himself an agent—no, let that wait until he had a sale or two he could report and a foot inside the door.

He strolled over to Broadway and down to Times Square. He stood looking at the Times Building, wondering what was strange about it—then realized that the strips of current news headlines in electric lights weren't flashing around as they should have been. Why not?

Oh sure—because daytime New York used a minimum of electric lighting. Those whatever-they-were rays emitted by electric lights and detectable by the Arcturian space-ships were blanked out at night by the mist-out but by day they weren't.

That was why, then, most places he'd been in had seemed so dimly lighted compared to the offices and stores and restaurants he'd known. Come to think of it, there hadn't been any artificial light at all in most of them.

He'd have to watch little things like that, to keep from giving himself away. He'd had the electric light on in his hotel room most of the time he'd been working. Luckily, he hadn't been called on it. Hereafter he'd move the desk and typewriter over closer to the window and leave the light off.

He walked past a news stand slowly, and read the headlines:

FLEET BLASTS ARC OUTPOST

Big Victory for Solar Forces

That ought to give him a kick, Keith thought, but it didn't. He couldn't hate Arcturians—he didn't even know what they looked like. This *was* real, yes, but it couldn't *seem* real to him yet. It still seemed like a dream he might wake up from. Dream? No, more like a nightmare. It was a world in which the only woman he'd ever really loved, head over heels, was engaged to somebody else.

He stood staring moodily at a window of hand-painted neckties. Something touched his shoulder and he turned around. He jumped back, almost striking the glass of the window. It was one of the big purple hairy Lunans, a Bem, no less.

It said, "Pardon me, do you have a match?"

Keith wanted to laugh, but his hand trembled a little as he handed over a package of matches and then took it back when the Lunan had lighted a cigarette.

It said, "Thank you, sir," and walked on.

Keith watched his back and the way he walked. Despite his bulging muscles he walked like a man wading through waist-high water. Heavy gravity, of course, Keith thought—on the Moon he'd be strong enough to throw Gargantua around. And he was slumped down, pulled together by that gravity. Not an inch over eight feet tall. On the Moon he'd probably be eight and a half.

But wasn't there supposed to be no air on the Moon? How could Lunans breathe? And they must breathe, because he'd lighted a cigarette. Anything that doesn't breathe couldn't smoke.

Suddenly, and for the first time, something occurred to Keith. He could *go* to the moon! *Mars! Venus!* Why not? In a universe with space-travel why not take advantage of it? A little chill of excitement went down his spine. Somehow he hadn't, in the few days he'd been here, thought of space-travel in connection with himself. Now the idea hit him like a ton of bricks.

It would take money, of course. He'd have to write plenty—but why couldn't he?

And there was another chance, once he had learned the ropes well enough to take a chance. Those coins he still had. If a nineteen twenty-eight quarter had brought him two hundred dollars, maybe one of the other coins he had would turn out to be a rare one, and bring him big money on whatever black market the secret coin collectors used. But for now, that was too dangerous.

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He strolled up Broadway as far as Forty-sixth, and then saw by a clock in a window that it was almost twelve-thirty. He went into a drugstore and phoned Keith Winton at Borden Publications.

Winton's voice said, "Oh, yes, Mr. Winston. Thought of something else I wanted to talk to you about, something you might do for us but it's a bit complicated to discuss over the phone. Are you free this afternoon?"

"Yes," Keith said.

"Wonder if you could drop up to my place. We can discuss it over a drink, maybe."

"Fine," Keith said. "Where and when?"

"Four o'clock all right? And I'm in Apartment six at three-one-eight Gresham, down in the Village. You'd probably better take a cab unless you know the district down there."

Keith grinned, but kept his voice serious. "I think I can find it all right," he said. He ought to be able to. He'd lived there for four years.

HE PUT back the receiver and went out to Broadway again, this time walking south. He stopped in front of the window of a travel agency.

Vacation Trips, the sign said. *All-Expense Tours to Mars and Venus. One Month, 5,000 Cr."*

Only five hundred bucks, he thought. Dirt cheap, as soon as he could earn five hundred bucks. And maybe it would take his mind off Betty.

He went back to his hotel, walking fast. He jerked paper and carbon into the typewriter and started working on the fourth story. He worked until the last minute, then hurried out and caught a subway train south.

The building was familiar and so was the name *Keith Winton* on the mailbox of Apartment 6 in the downstairs hallway. He pressed the buzzer and waited, with his hand on the latch, until it clicked.

Keith Winton—the *other* Keith Winton—was standing in the doorway of the apartment as Keith walked back along the hall.

"Come in, Winston," he said. He stepped back and opened the door wider. Keith walked in—and stopped suddenly. A big man with iron-gray hair and cold iron-gray eyes was standing there in front of the bookcase. There was a deadly looking forty-five automatic in his hand and it was pointed at the third button of Keith's vest. Keith stood very still, and raised his hands slowly.

He heard the door close behind him.

The big man said, "Better frisk him, Mr. Winton. From behind. Don't step in front of him. And be careful."

Keith felt hands running lightly over him, touching all his pockets.

"May I ask what the idea of this is?" Keith managed to keep his voice steady.

"No gun," Winton said. He stepped around where Keith could see him again. He stood there looking at Keith with puzzled eyes. He said, "I owe you an explanation, sure. And then you owe me one. Okay, Karl Winston—if that's really your name—meet Mr. Gerald Slade of the W. B. I."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Slade," Keith said. What, he was wondering, was the W. B. I.? World Bureau of Investigation? It seemed like a good guess. He looked back at his host. "Is that all the explanation you owe me?"

Winton glanced at Slade and then back at Keith. He said, "I thought it best to have Mr. Slade here. You brought me two stories this morning at the Borden office. Where did you get them?"

"Get them? I wrote them."

"You mean you *rewrote* them. They were stories I wrote five or six years ago. You did a nice rewrite job on them—I'll say that for you. They were better than the originals."

Keith opened his mouth, and closed it again. The roof of it felt dry and he thought he'd make a croaking noise if he tried to say anything. It was so obvious, now that he thought of it.

Why *shouldn't* the Keith Winton of this universe have written the same stories since he had the same job, lived in the same flat—everything the same except physical resemblance? Why hadn't he thought of the possibility?

He moistened his lips with his tongue. He had to say *something*. He said, "Lots of stories have similar plots. There have been lots of cases where—"

"These aren't just cases of similar plots. Too many of the minor details are identical. In one story, the names of the two main characters are the same as in my original of that story. Coincidence won't wash, Winston. Coincidence could account for similar basic plots, but not for identical bits of business.

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"Those stories were plagiarized. I've got copies in my files to prove it."

He stared at Keith, frowning. He went on, "I suspected something before I finished reading the first page of one story. When I'd read all of both stories I was sure of it. But I'll admit I'm puzzled. Why would a plagiarist have the colossal gall to try to sell stolen stories to the very man who wrote them? However or whenever you stole them, you must have known I'd recognize them. And—is Winston your real name?"

"Certainly."

"That's funny, too. A man calling himself Karl Winston offering stories written by a man named Keith Winton. What I can't understand, if it's a fake name, why you didn't pick one that wasn't so close."

Keith wondered about that himself.

The man with the automatic asked, "Got any identification with you?"

KEITH shook his head slowly. He had to stall, somehow, until he could figure an out—if there was one. He said, "Not with me. I can prove my identity, of course. I'm staying at the Watsonia Hotel. If you phone there—"

"If I phone there," Slade said, "I'll be told a man named Karl Winston is registered there. Sure, I phoned there already. That's the address on the manuscripts." He cleared his throat. "That doesn't prove anything except that you've been using the name Karl Winston for the two days you've been there."

He clicked the safety catch on the big automatic. His eyes hardened. He said, "I don't like to shoot a man in cold blood, but—"

Keith involuntarily took a step backwards. "I don't get it," he said. "Since when is plagiarism—even if I were guilty of it—something to shoot a man for?"

"We're not worried about plagiarism," Slade said grimly. "But we're under orders to shoot on sight anybody suspected of being an Arc spy. And there's one loose, last seen in Greeneville upstate. We got a kind of punk description but you could fit it. So—"

"Wait a minute," Keith said desperately. "There's a simple explanation of this somewhere. There's *got* to be. And, if I *were* a spy, wouldn't pulling a dumb stunt like stealing an editor's stories and trying to sell them back to him be the last thing I'd do?"

Winton said, "He's got something there, Slade. That's what puzzled me most about the whole thing. And I don't like the idea of shooting him down unless we're sure. Let me ask him one or two more questions."

He turned to Keith. "Look, Winston, you can see this is no time to stall. It won't get you anything but bullets. Now, if you're an Arc, heaven only knows why you'd have brought me those stories. Maybe I was supposed to react differently—do something else besides call a W. B. I. man. But if you're *not* an Arc, then there must be some explanation. Can you give it?"

Keith licked his lips again. For a moment, a desperate moment, he couldn't remember any of the places he'd submitted those stories to when he'd first written them. Then he remembered.

He said, "There's only one possibility I can think of. Did you ever submit those stories to the Gebhart chain of pulps in Chicago?"

"Yes—one of them anyway. Both, I guess. I've got a record of it."

"About five years ago?" Keith pressed.

"About that."

Keith took a deep breath. He said, "Five years ago I was a reader for Gebhart. I must have read your stories when they came in. I must have liked them and passed them, even if the editors over me didn't buy them. My subconscious mind must have remembered them." He frowned.

"*If* that's true I'd better quit writing—fiction, anyway. When I wrote those stories recently I thought they were original. If it was my subconscious memory of stories I'd read five years ago—"

He saw with relief that Slade's grip on the pistol wasn't quite so tight. Slade said, "Or you could have taken notes on those stories, intending to swipe them sometime later."

Keith shook his head. "If it had been deliberate plagiarism, wouldn't I have changed at least the names of the characters? And—" He started to say "the titles," but realized in time that he wouldn't be supposed to know whether the titles were the same or not. He turned to Winton and asked, "Did I use the same titles?"

"On one of them. On the other you had a better one." Winton leaned back against the table behind him and looked at Slade. He said, "That sounds reasonable to me, Slade. I'm inclined to believe him. And, as he says, if he were deliberately plagiarizing, he'd have changed them more than he did.

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They were well written—the actual writing is better than mine was, I'll admit." He took a deep breath. "It *could* be true and you almost shot the guy."

"I still should," Slade said. "You know as well as I do we aren't supposed to take chances with possible Arcs. In any case, I'm not taking this gun off him till we check forty ways for Sunday. For a start, you can put through a long distance call to this Chicago publisher and—wait, they'd be closed now, even if it's an hour earlier there."

Winton said, "Just a minute, Slade. I've got an idea. When I frisked him, I was looking for a gun and he hasn't got one. But I did feel a billfold."

Slade's eyes got even harder as he stared at Keith. "And no identification in it?"

There was, Keith thought bitterly, plenty of identification—but not as Karl Winston. All too clearly now he saw all the mistakes he had made. And it was too late now to try to correct any of them. Maybe he had only seconds to live.

The W. B. I. man didn't wait for him to answer. Obviously he wasn't going to believe him anyway. He said to Winton, without taking his eyes off Keith, "Get the wallet. And see if he's got anything else in his pockets. That's the last chance we'll give him."

The other Keith Winton circled to approach him from the back. Keith took a deep breath. This was going to be *it*. Besides the identification in that wallet he still had the incriminating coins, wrapped—so they wouldn't clink together—in money that was in dollars instead of credits. He hadn't dared leave the stuff in his hotel room. Well, it didn't matter. The wallet alone would be enough.

This was *it*. Either he was going to die here and now or else— Heroes in the stories he had bought back in a sane universe where he'd been a Borden editor instead of an Arcturian spy always managed to jump a gun. Was there a chance in a thousand that it could really be done?

NEXT ISSUE

DORMANT

by A. E. VAN VOGT

AND OTHER STORIES

CHAPTER XI

The Blacker Dark

THE man who was searching him was behind him now. Keith stood very still with the muzzle of the pistol aiming right at him. His mind was going like a millrace but it wasn't thinking of anything that would save him from being shot within the next minute or two. As soon as the other Keith Winton opened that wallet and read the identification in it. . . .

All Keith's attention was on the automatic. A gun like that, he knew, shot steel-jacketed bullets that would go right through a man. If Slade fired now he'd probably kill both of them, both Keith Wintons.

And then what? Would he wake up back on Borden's farm in Greeneville in a sensible world? No, not according to what Mekky, the mechanical brain, had said—*"This is real. . . . Your danger here is real. If you are killed here . . ."*

And, wildly improbable as Mekky himself was, he knew somehow that Mekky was dead right. Somehow there were two universes and two Keith Wintons but this one was just as real as the one he'd grown up in. The other Keith Winton was just as real as he was. And would the fact that one shot might kill them both delay the W. B. I. man's finger a second on the trigger? It might or it might not.

A hand was reaching into his hip pocket. It came out, holding the billfold. Keith found he was holding his breath. A hand went into his side trouser pocket—apparently his host was going to finish the search before opening the billfold.

Keith quit thinking and moved.

His hand closed on Winton's wrist, and he pivoted and swung Winton around in front of him, between himself and Slade. His trouser pocket ripped. Over Winton's shoulder he saw the W. B. I. man moving to the side to get a clear shot. He moved, keeping Winton between them.

Out of the corner of his eye he saw a fist coming for his face and he jerked aside, letting it pass over his shoulder and then stepped in low, butting his head against Winton's chest. Then, with both hands and with all the weight of his body and the momen-

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tum of his forward rush, he shoved Winton backward against Slade, following close.

Slade stumbled backward into the bookcase and glass crashed. The automatic went off, making a noise like a blockbuster in the confined space of the room.

Keith clung to Winton's lapels with both hands while his foot kicked up alongside Winton at the automatic. The toe of his shoe hit Slade's wrist and the automatic went out of Slade's hand. It clunked against the carpeted floor and Keith gave a final shove against Winton's chest and then dived for the gun. He got it.

He backed off, holding it to cover both of them. He was breathing hard and—now that the immediate action was over—his hand was trembling.

There was a knock on the door, and a sudden hush inside the apartment. Then a voice called, "Are you all right, Mr. Winton?" and Keith recognized the voice—that of Mrs. Flanders, who had the adjoining apartment. He made his voice sound as much like that of the other Winton as he could.

He called, "Everything's okay, Mrs. Flanders. Gun went off while I was cleaning it. The recoil knocked me over."

He stood still, waiting, knowing she'd be wondering why he didn't open the door. But all his attention had to be on the two men in front of him and he didn't take his eyes off them a second. He saw the puzzlement in Winton's eyes. Winton was wondering how he knew Mrs. Flanders' name and had recognized her voice.

After a few seconds he heard Mrs. Flanders' voice again. "All right, Mr. Winton. I just wondered." And her steps going back along the hall to her own apartment. She was still wondering, of course, why he hadn't opened the door—and there'd been a lot more noise than his falling over from a recoil could have made. But she wouldn't call copper right away. She'd keep on wondering awhile first.

But some other tenant might not. He had to do something quickly about Winton and the W. B. I. man. He couldn't just shoot them but he couldn't just walk out and leave them to start a chase after him. He needed at least a few minutes' grace to start his getaway. Getaway to where? he wondered, then shoved that thought out of his mind. Right now he couldn't figure more than minutes ahead.

"Turn around," he ordered, making his voice sound grim and deadly. He stepped in close to them, keeping the muzzle of the gun in the W. B. I. man's back—he was more afraid of Slade trying something than Winton—and felt Slade's hip pockets. Yes, there was a pair of handcuffs there. He took them, stepped back.

He said, "All right, step over by that post in the archway. You, Winton, reach through it. Then cuff yourselves together. Wait a second; first toss me your keys, Slade."

HE BACKED to the door when they had followed his orders. He started to tell them not to yell, then realized they would anyway and didn't bother. He slid the gun into his pocket and went through the door.

He heard their voices behind him as he went down the hall to the stairs and doors were popping open. He walked fast but wouldn't let himself run. Nobody, he thought, would actually try to stop him, although somebody would be phoning the police by now.

Nobody did stop him. He made the street and kept up his fast walk. He was a block away when he heard sirens. He slowed down instead of hurrying faster but he turned off Gresham Street at the next corner.

Within ten minutes squad cars would be cruising the neighborhood with his description. But by that time he could be on Fifth Avenue, walking north from Washington Square and they wouldn't be able to pick him out of the crowd. Or better yet—

A taxi went by, empty, and he started to hail it, then swore at himself as he realized he had forgotten to get his billfold back, in Winton's apartment. On top of everything else now, he was broke. He couldn't even take the subway.

A dozen blocks away, he felt safe from the squad cars that were undoubtedly looking for him. He was walking north on Fifth Avenue then and the sidewalks were fairly crowded.

He stepped up his pace a little when he noticed that most of the others were walking faster. Above all, he didn't dare to be inconspicuous. And there seemed to be hurry in the air.

The realization of the reason for it struck him almost like a blow. It was becoming twilight.

It was going to get dark pretty soon. *Dark?* That wasn't the word for it. The

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blacker dark, the mist-out. All these people were hurrying because they were scurrying home to get under cover for the night. The doors would be locked and barred and the streets left to crime and banditry and scavenging.

For the first time since he'd made his getaway from the apartment he stopped, wondering where he was going. Not back to his hotel, of course. They'd be waiting for him there. He'd given his right address on those manuscripts he'd turned in to Winton.

And that meant he'd lost everything—the clothes, the suitcase, the toilet articles. Again and more bitterly he thought of his stupidity in not getting his billfold back after Winton had taken it. There hadn't been a lot in it but enough that he could have taken a room for the night, enough to have lived on for at least a few days until there was a chance for him to figure a new plan for living in this mad world. Writing was out but maybe there was another way.

Broke, flat broke, what chance did he have? Somehow he'd give himself away at every turn. Of course there were the few coins from a sensible universe and he was glad now he hadn't dared to leave them in his hotel room. But they represented danger as well as possible capital. He shrugged. What difference could a little thing like that make now? If the police got him he was dead anyway, coins or no coins.

Slowly he started walking again, still northward. He knew where he was going now. Thirty-seventh Street, just off Third Avenue. The fifth floor.

It was dusk when he got there and the few people left on the streets were hurrying, almost running. It was deeper dusk because the street lights had not gone on as they should have by this time in the evening. And the street lights weren't going to go on.

A janitor was just reaching to lock the outer door as Keith opened it. The man's hand went quickly to his back pocket, but he didn't pull the gun. He asked, suspiciously, "Who you want to see?"

"Miss Hadley," Keith said. "Just staying a minute."

"Okay."

He walked back to the self-service elevator but the janitor's voice came back after him. "You'll haveta walk. Juice is off already, mister. And hurry down if you want me to take a chance on opening the door to let you out."

Keith nodded and took the stairs instead. He went up them rapidly and had to stop on the fifth floor landing to get his breath back. Then he rang the bell of the front apartment.

After a moment Betty's voice called out, "Who is it?"

"Karl Winston, Miss Hadley. It's important."

THE door opened on the chain, and Betty's face looked at him through the three-inch opening. Her eyes were a little frightened. He said, "Awfully sorry to bother you so late, Miss Hadley, but I've got to get in touch with *Mekky.* Is there any way it can be done?"

The chain slid out of the groove and the door opened. She said, "Come in, K-Keith Winton."

Scarcely daring to breathe, Keith stepped into the room. She'd called him by name, by his *right* name.

He stood with his back against the door, scarcely believing, staring at her. The room was dim, the shades already pulled down. The light came from a candle in a candlestick on the table behind Betty. Her face was shadowed but the dim light behind her made a golden aura of her soft blonde hair.

She asked, "You're in trouble? They found you out?"

He nodded.

"You haven't mentioned Mekky to anyone else? No one would think of your coming here?"

"No."

She turned and Keith saw for the first time that a colored maid was standing in the far doorway. Betty said, "It's all right. Della. You may go to your room."

"But, Miss—"

"It's all right, Della."

The door closed quietly behind the maid and Betty turned back to Keith.

He took a step toward her. He asked, "Do you—remember—uh—I don't understand. *Which* Betty Hadley are you? How could you have known—"

It sounded inarticulate and confused even to him.

She said, "Sit down, Mr. Winston. I'm going to call you that, to avoid confusing you with the other Keith Winton. What happened? Was it Keith Winton who found you out?"

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"Yes." Keith laughed a little bitterly. "The two stories I gave him were his own stories. I didn't even try to explain—and I'd have been shot first if I'd tried. And by the way, tear up that story I left with you. It's both an original and a plagiarism. But that's not important, now. What about Mekky?"

She shook her head slowly. "You can't reach Mekky. He's back with the fleet. The Arcs are—" She stopped short.

"Going to attack, I suppose," Keith said. "Mekky told me there was a crisis in the war." He laughed a little. "But I can't get excited about the war—I can't believe in it enough. What I want to know is what Mekky told you about me?"

Betty Hadley looked at him thoughtfully. "Not much," she told him. "He didn't know much himself. He hadn't time to go under the surface of your mind. But he learned that you were from—somewhere else. He didn't know where. He knew that where you came from you were called Keith Winton, although you don't look like the Keith Winton I know.

"He knew you were in a jam here because—well, because you don't know enough about things not to make mistakes. He knew you were not an Arc spy but that you'd get shot for one unless you were awfully careful."

Keith leaned forward. "What *is* Mekky? A robot, a thinking machine?"

"That—and a little more than that. Dopelle made him that but—I don't know. Even *he* doesn't understand—he has emotions too. Even a sense of humor."

The way she said the name Dopelle, Keith thought—the way she emphasized the pronoun—almost capitalized it. She's more than in love with him, Keith thought—she worships him.

He closed his eyes a second and when he opened them he didn't look at her. He hardly heard what she was saying, until he realized she was asking a question.

"What can I do? Mekky told me he saw in your mind that you might come to me for help. He said it would be all right if I didn't take any risk myself."

"I wouldn't let you do that," Keith said. "And no one followed me here or could even suspect I'd come here. But I don't know how you can help unless you can get in touch with Mekky. My masquerade here has blown up higher than a kite. And I haven't got any answers for the questions the cops would ask—even if they stopped to ask questions. Mekky, I hope, could give me the answers—and vouch for them."

She nodded. "But there's no way you could get in touch with Mekky unless you could get to the fleet."

"Where's the fleet?"

SHE hesitated, frowning, before she decided to speak. "Near Saturn. But you couldn't get there. You'll have to wait it out somehow. Have you money?"

"No, but I don't—wait, there's something you can tell me. I might be able to look it up at the library or somewhere, but I can find out from you quicker. What's the score on coinage—metal coins."

"Metal coins? There haven't been any since nineteen thirty-five. They were called in then."

"Why?"

"The Arcs were counterfeiting them—and paper money, too. They had a network of spies here then. One of the things they did was try to disrupt Earth's economic systems by flooding the world with counterfeit money. It couldn't be told from real money even by experts.

"A bad inflation started and everything would have gone smash. So the war council of the nations got some scientists together and they figured out a kind of paper currency that couldn't be counterfeited: I don't know what the secret is. Nobody does, except a few scientists.

"Something they use in the paper gives off a faint yellowish glow in the dark or in deep shadow. Anybody can spot counterfeit money because no counterfeiter—nor the Arcs—has been able to duplicate paper that gives off that glow."

Keith asked, "Was that when the change was made from dollars and cents to credits?"

"Yes—in all countries. Each country backs its own coinage but it's all in credits and all kept at par so it's interchangeable."

Keith said, "So after the old money had been called in for exchange, it was illegal to possess any. But there are coin collectors who do?"

"Yes. It's illegal and there's a pretty stiff fine. But there are coin collectors, plenty of them. It's not considered a real moral crime."

"Like drinking during Prohibition?"

Betty looked bewildered. "Like what?"

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"Skip it." Keith took the little wad of money out of his pocket, the coins wrapped in the bills. He opened them out and studied them. He said, "I've got five coins here and two bills that are dated before nineteen thirty-five. About what would they be worth?"

He handed them to Betty, who glanced at them. She said, "I don't know just what prices are paid. I'd guess about ten thousand credits—a thousand dollars by the old scale. What are those other coins and bills?"

"Dated *after* nineteen thirty-five. So they're impossible. I nearly got myself killed giving one to a druggist in Greeneville."

"But how *could* they be dated after—"

Keith sighed. "I don't know either. But I'll drop them down the sewer as soon as I leave here. The others are dangerous enough. Look—about Arcturian spies. Are Arcturians human beings? Can't they tell an Arcturian from an Earthman?"

"They're horribly different." The girl shuddered. "Monsters, More like insects in appearance, bigger of course, and as intelligent as we are. But back in the early days of the war they captured a lot of people alive, on some of their first raids. They can—*take over* people, put one of their minds into a human body and use it for a spy.

"There aren't so many now. Most of them have been killed. Sooner or later they give themselves away because their minds are alien. And since those early days they haven't been able to capture many humans alive."

"But even so," Keith said, "why shoot on suspicion? Why aren't they arrested and, if their minds are actually alien, a psychiatrist should be able to prove or disprove that they're Arcturians. Don't a lot of innocent people get killed?"

"Yes, maybe a hundred for every real spy. But—well, they're *so* dangerous, especially now that the war is in the current stage, that it's better, really *better*, that a thousand people die than that an Arc spy should stay at large.

"If they got a few of our secrets to add to their own science it could change the tide of the war. And that would mean the end of the whole human race, the death of billions. So it's not considered a crime to kill a human being by mistake if there's cause to think he's an Arc. Don't you see?"

"Not completely. If you could capture them and be sure first wouldn't that be just as good?"

"It's too dangerous. Too many of them have escaped on the way to jail or even after they were locked up. They have special powers, physical and mental."

KEITH grinned wryly. "So one of them could maybe take the gun away from the W. B. I. man who was holding it on him. Well, if they had any doubts before in my case, they haven't now."

He stood up. For a long moment he stared at Betty Hadley, then turned his head and looked at the window. It was black, blank.

The mist-out was on.

He said, "Thank you. Good-bye."

She stood, too. Her eyes went to the window, as his had. "But where are you going to go? You might take a chance for a block or two if you're careful, but—"

"I'm armed."

"But you haven't any place to go. You can't stay here, of course; there's just Della and I. But there's a vacant apartment on the floor below. I can fix it with the janitor so—"

"*No!*".

Keith's answer was so explosive that he felt foolish after he had said it.

"But tomorrow I can talk to the W. B. I. I can explain that Mekky vouched for you to me. It won't be safe until Mekky is back a few months from now, for you to be running loose—but on my word for it they might hold you in protective custody until he does come back."

Possibly there was a shade of uncertainty on Keith's face, for she kept talking, pressing the point. She said, "They will believe me enough to give you the benefit of the doubt. Because I'm Dopelle's fiancée—"

She couldn't have known it, but it had been the wrong thing to say. Keith shook his head slowly.

He said, "No. I'm going out. You—you're really in love with this Dopelle?"

She said only, "Yes," but the way she said it was enough.

"Good-bye then, Miss Hadley," Keith said.

She held out her hand to him but he pretended not to see it. He didn't trust himself to touch it.

He went out quickly.

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CHAPTER XII

The Moon

ON HIS way down the stairs he began to realize how foolish he had been and to be glad that he had been foolish. He was mad—not at anybody but at everything. He was tired, very tired, of being pushed around. He'd been as cautious and careful as he knew how and it had kept getting him into worse and worse trouble.

Now he was going to quit being cautious. It would probably get him killed, and quickly, but—well, what did he have to lose?

In the downstairs hallway the man with the gun was still there. He said, "Y'ain't going *out,* are you, mister?"

Keith grinned at him. "Yes. Got to see a man about a sphere."

"You mean *Mekky?* Gonna see *Dopelle?"* There was awe in the man's voice. He went to the door, gun ready in his hand. He said, "Well, if you're a friend of *his*—and I shoulda guessed it if you were seeing Miss Hadley—maybe you know what you're doing. I hope so."

Keith said, "We both hope so." He slid through the doorway and heard the door slammed and bolted behind him.

He stood there in the utter blackness of the mist-out, and listened. There wasn't a sound from any direction. He felt his way to the curb and took off his shoes, tying the laces together and hanging them around his neck. Without them on, nobody would be able to hear and stalk him.

He shifted the forty-five automatic to his coat pocket and kept his hand on it.

It was easy, if awkward, to follow the curb line by walking with one foot on the curbing and the other down in the street. The feel of a sewer grating under his foot reminded him of the coins and bills he had to get rid of, the ones dated after nineteen thirty-five. He'd put them back in a different pocket. He shoved them through the grating of the sewer.

With that out of the way, he went on, listening.

Funny, he thought; he wasn't afraid. Maybe because now, tonight, he was the hunter and not the hunted.

He was three blocks south of where he had turned onto Fifth Avenue before he heard a quarry. Not footsteps—whoever it was either was standing still against the front of a building or else he had, like Keith, taken off his shoes to walk silently. The sound Keith heard was a slight, barely audible sniffle.

He stood very still, scarcely breathing, until he heard it again, and then he knew the man was moving, going south. The second sound had come from that direction.

Keith hurried his steps, almost running, in the direction he'd already been going until he was sure he was well ahead of his victim. Then he cut diagonally across the sidewalk and groped with his hands ahead of him until he came to the building fronts. Then he drew the automatic from his pocket and stood, waiting.

Something bumped into the muzzle of the pistol, and Keith's left hand darted out and caught the front of a coat to keep the man from pulling away. "Don't move," he said sharply, and then, "Turn around, very slowly."

There'd been no answer but a sharp intake of breath. The man turned. Keith's left hand groped, crossed over, and pulled a revolver out of a right hip picket. He put it into his own pocket.

He said, "Don't move, or I'll shoot. We're going to talk. Who are you?"

A tight voice said, "What do you care who I am? All I got on me is about thirty credits and that rod. You got the rod. Take the dough too and let me go."

"I don't want your thirty credits. I want some information. If I get it straight I might even give your rod back. Do you know your way around here?"

"What do you mean?"

Keith said, "I don't know the ropes here. I'm from St. Lou. I got to find me a fence."

There was a pause, and the voice was a little less tight now. "Jewelry—or what?" it asked.

"Coins. A few bills, too, pre-thirty-five dollars. Who handles the stuff here?"

"What's in it for me?"

Keith said, "Your life for one thing. Your gun back. And—if you don't try to cross me—maybe a hundred credits. Two hundred, if I get a fair price."

"Peanuts. Make it five hundred."

Keith chuckled. "You're in a swell position to bargain. I'll make it two hundred and thirty. You already got the thirty; consider

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I took it away from you and gave it back."

SURPRISINGLY, the man laughed too. He said, "You win, mister. I'll take you to see Ross. He won't cheat you any worse than anybody else would. Come on."

"One thing first," Keith said. "Strike a match. I want a look at you. I want to know you again, if you make a break."

"Okay," the voice said. It was relaxed now, almost friendly. A match scraped and flared.

Keith's captive, he saw, was a small, slender man of about forty, not too badly dressed but in need of a shave and with slightly bleary eyes. He grinned, a bit lopsidedly.

"You'll know me," he said, "so you might as well have a handle. It's Joe."

"Okay, Joe. How far is this Ross guy?"

"Couple blocks. He'll be in a game." The match died. "Look, how much worth of stuff you got?"

"Somebody told me ten thousand credits."

"Then you might get five. Ross is square. But listen—gun or no gun, you'll do better to cut me in. There'll be other guys there. We could take you easy."

"Okay, Joe, maybe you've got something there. I'll cut you in for a fifth—a thousand if we get five thousand. Fair enough?"

"Yeah, fair enough."

Keith hesitated only a second. He'd need a friend, and there was something in Joe's voice and there had been something in Joe's face that made him think he could take a chance. His whole plan—if you could call it that—was a desperate gamble.

Impulsively, he took Joe's revolver out of his pocket, groped for Joe's hand, and gave the gun back to him.

But there wasn't any surprise in Joe's voice when he said, "Thanks. Two blocks south. I'll go first."

They single-filed along the building fronts, locked arms while they crossed two streets. Then Joe said, "Stick close, now. We go back the areaway between the second and third buildings from the corner. Keep your hand on my shoulder."

Back in the areaway, Joe found a door and knocked—three times and then twice. It opened and light blinded them momentarily. A man at the door lowered a sawed-off shotgun and said "Hi, Joe," and they went in.

Four men were sitting around a poker table. Joe said to the man who was putting down the shotgun, "Friend of mine from St. Lou, Harry. Got some business with Ross." He nodded at one of the men at the table, a swarthy, stocky man with cold eyes behind thick lenses. "He's got coinage, Ross."

Keith merely nodded and, without speaking, put the coins and bills on the table in front of the stocky man.

Ross examined each one carefully, and then looked up. "Four grand," he said.

"Five," Keith said. "They're worth ten."

Ross shook his head. Keith felt a touch on his arm. Behind him, Joe said, "I should have told you. Ross is one-price. If he offers you four grand, he won't give you four thousand and one. You take it or leave it."

"And if I leave it?" Keith asked over his shoulder.

"I know a couple more guys. But I'm not sure we can find 'em tonight. And I doubt if they'd do better than Ross."

Keith nodded. "Okay," he said, "four grand, if it's cash and you've got it with you."

"I got it with me." Ross pulled out a bulging wallet and counted out two thousand-credit notes and twenty hundreds. He folded Keith's coins carefully inside the bills again and put them in his vest pocket.

"Sit in a while on the game?"

"Thanks, no," Keith said. Counting the money, he glanced at Joe, who almost imperceptibly shook his head to indicate he didn't want to take his cut here.

The man who'd let them in picked up the shotgun again before he opened the door to let them out.

Outside, in the blackness again, they moved out of earshot of the door and then Joe said, "A fifth of four thousand's eight hundred. Want me to light a match so you can count it?"

"Okay—unless you know somewhere we can have a drink and talk a few minutes. We might do some more business."

"An idea," Joe said. "A little farther south in this same block. I could use a snort of moonjuice."

Again Joe led the way and again he led back into an areaway and knocked measured knocks on a door. Again light blinded them momentarily, and then they were in the back room of a tavern. There were a few others there ahead of them, not many. It was still, Keith reflected, comparatively early in the evening.

They took a table and Joe ordered moon-

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juice. Keith nodded that he'd take the same. While the aproned bartender was bringing them from the front Keith counted out eight hundred-credit notes and passed them across to Joe.

Joe nodded and shoved his hat back on his head. "You're a right guy," he said. "Hope we can do more business. But you're a fool."

"For what? Giving you back your rod, back there?"

"Yeah. Well—maybe you weren't. If you hadn't done that, I'd probably have taken you. If I'd given the signal back there at the game you wouldn't have lasted—"

HE BROKE off as the bartender came back with two shot glasses of transparent fluid. "On me," Joe said, and put down one of the bills Keith had just given him. He raised his glass, "Death to the Arcs."

Keith touched glasses, but took a cautious sip of his first. He'd wondered whether "moonjuice" was a nickname for some drink he already knew, or whether it was as exotic as it sounded.

It wasn't like anything he'd ever dreamed of, let alone tasted. It was thick, almost syrupy, but it wasn't sweet. And, paradoxically, it was cool and hot at the same time. It left a cool taste in his mouth at the same time it burned a passage down his gullet.

He saw that Joe had only sipped his, so he didn't down it.

"The real stuff," Joe said. "Got much of it out west?"

"Some. Not much."

"How are things out there?"

"Fair," Keith said. He wished that he could talk more, but there was always the risk of saying something wrong. He'd have to appear taciturn.

"Where are you staying here?" Joe asked, after another sip.

"Nowhere yet. Just blew in. Should have holed in before the mist-out, but I—had something to do."

"I can take you to a place. Whenever you're ready. The evening's a pup."

Keith nodded. They finished their drinks and Keith ordered a second round. Whatever moonjuice was he liked it. It seemed to clear his head rather than otherwise. He wished he could ask questions about it but of course he couldn't. This was the last one, though, he decided. The stuff might be tongue-loosening and he couldn't risk that.

After a sip from the second glass of it, he leaned forward across the table. "Joe," he asked, "where can I find an ex-space pilot who'd like to make a thousand credits on the side?"

Joe's eyes narrowed a little. "You kidding?"

That meant it had been a bad question but Keith couldn't see why. Anyway, he might as well go ahead now. There were only half a dozen people in the place; he might be able to shoot his way out, even if he gave himself away.

"Why should I be kidding?" he demanded.

To his relief, Joe grinned. He jerked a thumb at his lapel. Following the gesture, Keith noticed an emblem there, about the size of and rather similar to the ruptured duck he himself had worn for a while.

"Oh," he said and moved his hand away from the pocket with the automatic in it; he hadn't made a major boner after all. "Didn't notice it, Joe. How long you been out?"

"Five years. Based out of Kapi, Mars. Glad I wasn't there a few days ago." He shook his head slowly. "Guess there isn't much left of Kapi."

"We'll get back at them for that," Keith said.

"Maybe."

Keith said, "You sound pessimistic."

Joe lighted a cigarette, slowly. He said, "There's a showdown coming. A big one. Oh, I don't know anything except what I read between the lines but when you've been out there you get the feel of things. There's a full scale attack coming—I don't know which, us or them. But one way or the other it isn't going to last forever."

Keith nodded gravely. He remembered he'd better stick to the point and talk as little as necessary. He couldn't discuss the war very intelligently, so he'd better skip it. He asked, "Been to the Moon recently?"

"Year ago." Joe's lips twisted. "Hadn't started mist-outing then, yet. Thought I could make an honest living like a chump. Piloted a rich guy there in his own boat. What a brawl that was."

"Bad?"

"Six of 'em in the party, and drunk as lords. A six-year-old kid could peelot one of those Ehrling jobs, but none of 'em was

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sober enough to do it. I was driving a cab, picked 'em up one afternoon on Times Square and drove 'em over to Jersey to his private port and he offered me a thousand to take 'em there.

"I hadn't been off Earth in two years and I just abandoned my cab and took 'em. We went to Habcrul and stayed a week." He shook his head sadly. "My grand lasted less than a day, but they kept me with them."

Keith asked, "Those Ehrlings much different from the hot jobs?"

Joe laughed. "Same difference as between a kiddy car and a midget racer. All visual. Direct sight on your objective, push the button. Spread your wings and coast in. Complicated as drinking moonjuice. Have another?"

"Thanks, no. Let's talk business. Want to make a thousand, Joe? I want to get to the moon."

Joe shrugged. "Why pay a thousand, pal? Every hour on the hour from LaGuardia. Ninety credits round trip."

Keith leaned forward. "Can't Joe. I'm hot—dodgers out from St. Lou and they'll be watching all the ports. Besides, some St. Lou friends of mine might be expecting me there. I'd just as soon walk in their back door."

"That way," said Joe, reflectively. "But—pal, for a thousand credits do you expect me to steal a private boat and take you there?"

"No. I want you to help me steal a boat and show me how to run it. You don't have to go along. How long would it take you to show me the controls?"

"Half an hour. But swiping a boat, pal—that isn't peanuts if we're caught. It's ten years on Venus." His eyelids dropped a little and he stroked the back of one hand with the palm of the other. "I been to Venus once. I don't want to go back."

Keith made a rapid calculation. He said, "Three thousand credits, Joe."

Joe sighed. "It's a deal. When you want to go?"

"Tonight," Keith said.

Maybe it was the moonjuice, maybe it was his years of having read science-fiction, maybe it was just that he was human, but there was a sudden wild elation in him. The Moon!

And the other word that rounded out the magic of it. He said it again, *"Tonight!"*

CHAPTER XIII

The Song of the Spheres

JOE sighed again. "That's bad," he said. "But if it's got to be tonight, then it's got to be tonight. It'll be tougher getting out of town from under the mist-out than it will be to swipe the boat. That means I got to swipe a car too."

"You can though?"

"Oh sure. But we'll have to crawl in it, not much faster than walking. The mist-out doesn't taper off till three or four miles into Jersey either. Take us a good three hours to get that far."

"Sounds like pretty good time to me," Keith said.

"Aren't many guys could do it," Joe said modestly. "You were lucky you picked me. I'll show you a trick not many know—how to navigate a car by dead reckoning and a compass. What time is it?"

"A little after nine."

"We can get a car in half an hour or less. We'll be out of the mist-out by one then and the port we'll go to is about thirty miles into Jersey but we'll be in the open then. I'll have you there by two o'clock."

"The private port of this rich guy you mentioned?"

"Yeah. He's got two. One's a little two-place job—that'll be best for you if it's in. If it isn't you'll have to take the big one, the one we made that trip I told you about in. Guess they'll both be there, come to think of it. Read in the paper he's under fire from a congressional committee, so he'll stick to Earth for a while. He makes rajiks."

"Oh," said Keith.

"One more moonjuice and we'll go."

"If it's on me," Keith said.

He sipped it slowly, lingeringly. He was getting a little scared again in spite of the moonjuice. Thus far he'd been lucky—but he was still in Manhattan and Saturn was a long way off. Saturn and the space fleet and Mekky.

Then again they were in the almost impenetrable blackness of the mist-out. Again they went single-file, with Keith keeping his hand on the shoulder of the man walking ahead of him and Joe guiding them along the buildings with an outstretched arm.

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At the first corner he stopped. "Wait here. I can get a car better by myself. I know where. Stick right here till you hear me coming."

And he was off again into the blackness, walking so silently that Keith couldn't hear a sound except, once, the faint sniffle that had enabled him to catch Joe in the first place. That slight cold of Joe's had been a break, for Joe was turning out to be a God-send.

He couldn't keep much track of time, standing there, for he didn't want to light matches to see his watch. But it seemed like less than a half hour before he heard a car coming, inching along the curb, the occasional scrape of rubber against the curb-stone.

Keith waited until it stopped and then felt his way toward where the sound had last come from. He felt the side of a sedan, said Joe's name and got an answering, "Yeah." He got in.

Joe said, "Here's the trick. You got to use the flashlight." He pressed one into Keith's hand. "Turn it on and keep it aimed at the floorboards of the car. Now take this chalk and draw a line parallel with the wheelbase of the car, front to back, as straight as you can."

The flashlight, held within a foot of the floor, let Keith do that all right. "Good," Joe said. "Now here's the compass. Put it down by the line. Now wait till I turn the car south when we get a block over, to Sixth Avenue. I can go that far by the seat of my pants."

The car inched forward and Keith turned off the flashlight. A few minutes later Joe stopped the car. "Get out and catch a house number," he said. "We ought to be close to Sixth."

Keith got out and fell over the curb. He got up and groped his way to the line of building fronts. A minute later he was back in the car. "Just overshot it," he said. "Back up the width of one building and then head south."

Joe did, then drove ahead a little till they were out of the intersection.

"Now the flashlight again," he said. "From here on we can make ten miles an hour. Look, that's the line of direction of the car, see? Here's the compass. Now Sixth Avenue runs about southeast by south—all the straight streets do. Turns just a trifle more east at Minetta Place and then goes straight again till we get to Spring Street.

"There we take that right into the tunnel. Now you keep the flashlight on that line and the compass and keep me going straight. I'll watch the speedometer and check distances. We can go ten miles an hour."

"What if we hit something?"

"Won't kill us at ten an hour. If we ruin the car we'll have to swipe another. We'll waver from one side of the street to the other, but if you keep close watch on that compass, we shouldn't scrape curbing oftener than every few blocks—and whenever we do, we realign ourselves. Ready? Here we go."

Joe was a skillful pilot, it turned out, and knew the streets and directions beautifully. They scraped rubber against the curb only twice before they reached Spring Street and only twice, on the Sixth Avenue leg of the trip, did he have Keith get out and check house numbers.

ONCE, in the Holland Tunnel Keith heard another car go by them, heading in from Jersey but they were lucky and didn't even scrape fenders.

Joe knew the Jersey side too and kept them on straight streets where they could navigate with the compass. After a mile or so he turned the headlights on and Keith could see that they penetrated ten or twelve feet into the blackness.

Joe said, "Okay, pal. It tapers off from here. You can lay off the compass now."

The headlights shot their beams farther and farther and before long it was an ordinary night they were driving through—an ordinary night with stars and a moon. Keith looked at the Moon and took a deep breath.

He thought, "This is a dream. I'm not really going there."

At one-fifteen by Keith's watch, Joe pulled the car to the side of the road. He said, "We're here, pal." He turned off the headlights and took the flashlight from Keith. "Across these fields. It's pretty isolated back there. We won't even have to be careful. Hope they don't swipe the car on me before I get back to it."

They started across the fields. The moonlight was so bright that they didn't need the flashlight. Keith said, "How'll you get back into town in the car alone? Can you manage the car and the compass both?"

"I won't go back to New York tonight.

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I'll drive the car into Trenton or somewhere and spend the night there. They might be watching for that car in the morning if it's reported early. So I'll go in by train and let them find it in Jersey. It's just past these trees."

He used the flashlight, going through the grove, and on the far side of it were a big landing field and a big all-glass building like a monster greenhouse. Through the glass, Keith could see the two space-ships Joe had told him about. They looked more like airplanes than space-ships. The big one was about the size of a transport plane and the little one not much bigger than a Piper Cub.

Joe said, "Wait here. I'll walk once around and be sure the coast's clear."

When he came back, he nodded. Keith held the flashlight while Joe opened the door with a picklock. "Good thing the little job will do. It's foolproof. I can show you how to run it in ten or twenty minutes. Know anything at all about space navigation?"

"Not a thing."

"Well, then it's good you won't want the Ehrling. It'd take me a while to teach you that one."

Keith was walking around the smaller space-ship. Now, at closer range, he could see it was less like an airplane than he had thought. The wings were shorter and stubbier. What had looked like canvas felt more like asbestos. And there wasn't any propeller.

"Here's the airlock," Joe said. "Just turn this handle. If you open it in space for any reason—and you'd better put on a space-suit first. There's two inside the ship. You got to open this valve first and let the air out of the ship first. Then, after you're back in, you start the airmaker and it builds up. I'll show you that. Get on in."

Keith sat at the pilot's seat and Joe, beside him, explained the controls. They were simple, Keith thought, much simpler than those on a light plane.

"Here's the sighter," Joe was saying. "Just aim that where you want to go. And these dials set the distance. Big one's in hundred-thou-mile units, next one in thousand, and on down to the little vernier in feet. That's for hangaring of course. Now for the Moon—you landing on this side or the far side?"

"This side."

"Then just sight on where you want to go, set this dial—the repulsor—for ten miles. When you're ready, push this button and you dematerialize here and materialize ten miles above the moon. That's safe for the Moon. Better allow twenty miles for Earth, thirty for Venus, about fifteen for Mars.

"Minute you materialize there, you start falling. Put the nose in a steep glide and let yourself fall and the wings begin to take hold as you get down into the atmosphere. Glide in and land her like a glider. That's all.

"If you're going to miss your place or make a bad landing—well, you'll have your finger on the button and you push it and you flash back ten miles high again and start over. That's all there is to it, pal. Got it?"

"I guess so," Keith said. It sounded simple enough. Anyway he saw a clip on the inside of the airlock door with a book entitled *Manual of Instructions* under it so he could pick up anything he'd missed or forgotten to ask.

He took out his billfold and counted out the three thousand credits he'd promised Joe. It left him less than two hundred but he probably wasn't going to need any anyway.

"Okay, pal," Joe said. "Thanks—and luck. Look me up sometime when you're back. The place we had the moonjuice."

AFTER Joe had gone, he reached for the manual of instructions and studied it closely for nearly an hour.

It was even simpler than he'd realized. You aimed at your objective and guessed or roughly estimated the distance—and if you were wrong it didn't matter because, if you were short, you merely needed to press the button again and, if you were over, it didn't matter if you had the repulsor set for ten miles short of the object, because it would stop you there.

Gliding in didn't seem any tougher than making a dead-stick landing in a light plane, with the added advantage that you could flash back up in nothing flat and start over again if it looked as though your landing weren't going to be good.

He looked up through the glass panel in the top of the space-ship, through the glass roof of the hangar, through the atmosphere of Earth and the nothingness of space—at the stars and the Moon.

Should he go to the Moon first? There was no important reason for it. His almost hopeless destination—Mekky and the fleet

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near Saturn—wasn't going to be any more accessible from there than from here. But he knew he stood a good chance of never getting to Mekky alive and he knew too that, if he did get there, he was going to try to get back to his own world.

Before he died or before he went back, one or the other, he wanted just once to set foot on the Moon. He'd skip the planets—but, just once, he wanted to stand on ground that wasn't that of Earth.

It wouldn't cost him much time, and there wouldn't—or shouldn't—be much risk. The paragraph on the moon in the manual of instruction had told him that the settlements, the fertile lands, were on the far side, where there was water and where the air was thicker. On the near side were only barren rock and a few mines.

He took a deep breath and strapped himself into the seat. He set the dials for two hundred and forty thousand miles and the repulsor dial for ten miles, checked his aim for dead center and pushed the button.

Nothing happened, nothing at all. He must have forgotten to turn a switch somewhere. He realized that he'd closed his eyes when he'd pushed the button and opened them again to look over the instrument panel. Nothing was wrong.

Or was it? There *was* something different, a sensation of lightness, of falling, of going down in a very fast elevator. He looked upward through the top panel and the Moon wasn't there any more but the stars were and they looked brighter and closer and more numerous than he'd ever seen them.

But where was the Moon?

He looked down through the glass panel in the floor and saw it rushing up at him, only miles away.

He caught his breath as he set the dials again, ready to flash him back to a point above the atmosphere, then took the stick and put his feet on the pedal controls. The wings seemed to be catching air now and the craft was at the right slant to go into a glide.

But it had been too sudden, too unexpected—he wasn't ready. He pressed the button and again nothing happened—apparently—except that suddenly the Moon was a little farther away again.

This time he waited it out, going into a glide. He kept his finger on the button until he cleared the edge of a crater and saw he was heading for a flat level plain on which even a dub couldn't miss making a good landing.

He made one, and rolled to a stop. Slowly he unstrapped himself. He hesitated just a moment with his hand on the latch of the airlock, wondering if there really was air outside. But there had to be. He'd glided down.

He opened the door and stepped out. Yes, there was air, thin and quite cold, like the air atop a high mountain of Earth. He looked around, shivering, and was disappointed. He might have been standing on rocky, barren land on Earth, with mountains in the distance. It didn't look any different.

It felt, different, though. He felt unbelievably light. How high were you able to jump on the Moon? He took an experimental little hop that wouldn't have taken him over six inches high on Earth and went several feet into the air. He came down more slowly and lightly than he'd expected. But doing it gave him a queasy feeling at the pit of his stomach and he didn't try it again.

He looked up, wondering what was wrong in that direction. It looked like an ordinary Earth sky, except that the sun was brighter. But wasn't *that* wrong? Weren't you supposed to be able to see stars in daytime from the Moon? Shouldn't the sky, except for the bright ball of the sun, be dark?

But that was because scientists thought there wasn't any air on the Moon. Were they wrong on that—back there in his own universe, too? Or was that just another difference between this universe and his—that the Moon of this universe had air and his didn't?

He turned around slowly, then caught his breath at sight of what he'd forgotten to look for. The Earth, a monster yellowish ball, hung there in the sky, looking as the moon looks when seen from Earth in daytime but larger. And he could see the outline of continents on it. It looked like a big globe of Earth hanging there.

He stared at it wonderingly for a long minute, until the sharp feel of cold air in his throat and lungs reminded him that he'd freeze if he stood out here much longer. It must be close to zero and he was dressed for summer in New York.

Regretfully he took his eyes off the magnificent sphere in the sky, then got back into the space-ship and closed the airlock. The

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air inside was thin and cold now, too—but now that the airlock door was closed the airmaker unit and the heater would bring it back to normal automatically.

He strapped himself back into the pilot's seat, thinking, "Well, I've been on the Moon."

It hadn't thrilled him as much as he'd thought and he believed he knew why. It was because—here, in this universe—it didn't seem completely real, however real this universe was. It was too easy. Much too easy.

Yes, he knew now, definitely, that what he wanted was to get *back*, back to the world he was born in and on which he belonged. Maybe he was too old to readjust himself to something like this. Maybe if it had happened when he'd been seventeen instead of thirty-one and if he'd been heart-free instead of head-over-heels in love, this universe would have been just what the doctor ordered.

But it wasn't now. He wanted back and there was only one mind—a mechanical one—that might be able to help him do that.

He set the pointer at Earth and the dial at only a hundred and twenty thousand miles, halfway between Earth and Moon. Out there in space, he could take his time about locating Saturn.

He pushed the button.

CHAPTER XIV

Monster from Arcturus

HE WAS used to nothing happening when he pressed that button. It didn't surprise him at all that suddenly the Earth was twice as big as it had been before. But it did surprise him that he himself felt so strange.

It surprised him until he realized that he was almost completely weightless here. What pull there was pulled him away from the straps in the seat, toward Earth overhead. Then the ship itself must have overcome its inertia and started falling in that direction and he felt completely weightless.

Well, it would take him a long time to fall a hundred and twenty thousand miles. More time than he thought he'd need.

He began, first through one panel and then another, to scan the sky. It shouldn't be too hard to find Saturn. Out here in space, with no atmosphere to blunt vision, the stars were monstrous compared to the way they looked from Earth. Even on Earth rare people, with gifted eyesight, were said at times to be able to distinguish the rings of Saturn. From here, in space, normal eyesight ought to do it easily.

And he wouldn't have to search the entire sky, even though he didn't know Saturn's present position. He knew enough of elementary astronomy to recognize the plane of the ecliptic and Saturn would be in that plane.

He'd have to look along a line, not throughout the whole sky. Of course, if Saturn were on the other side of the Sun, he'd have to try from there. But from here the Sun was a fiery ball in a black sky and occulted only a small fraction of the line of the ecliptic.

It took him a minute to get his bearings because there were so many more stars here than he was used to seeing. They didn't twinkle, they glowed like luminous diamonds on a piece of black velvet. But he found the Dipper and then the belt of Orion and, after that, it was easy to locate the constellations of the zodiac.

He followed it around, carefully, studying each celestial object near the imaginary line. He got a little thrill out of seeing a reddish disk that must be Mars, a reddish disk with faint crackly lines on it.

He followed the line through about thirty degrees and there it was. The rings weren't quite edge-on but they were unmistakable. And there was only one object in the whole sky that had rings.

He put the pointer on it and reached for the manual of instructions, in which there was a table of orbital distances. Yes, there it was—Saturn, 886,779,000. It was in the same general direction from the sun as Earth was and that made it easy to figure.

Knock off the 93,000,000-odd miles of Earth's distance from the sun, and Saturn was 793-odd million miles away from him. And, if he overguessed, it wouldn't matter as long as he had his repulsor set. He set the dials at 800,000,000 miles, and the repulsor to stop him a thousand miles away from Saturn, checked the pointer again and pressed the button.

The beauty of the ringed planet—and its tremendous size from only a thousand miles away—made him catch his breath. He hadn't

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realized how close a thousand miles was to a planet nearly 74,000 miles in diameter, about nine times the diameter of the Earth. It was a full minute before he could look away from it and start searching the sky for the Earth fleet, the war fleet.

He didn't find it—it found him. A voice startled him by saying, "Do not move." It was a physical, actual voice, not one inside his head as Mekky's voice had been. This wasn't Mekky. The voice said, "What are you doing here? Pleasure craft are forbidden outside the orbit of Mars."

He located it this time while the voice was speaking. It came out of a tiny speaker set into the instrument panel. He hadn't noticed it before. Alongside it was what looked like a pick-up mike.

Keith said, "I want to see Mekky. It's important." While he spoke he looked out through the vision panels and saw them—half a dozen oblong objects that globed him in at close range, occulting big chunks of the sky. He couldn't guess how big they were without knowing their distance nor their distance without knowing their size.

The voice said sternly, "Under no circumstances are civilians or occupants of civilian craft allowed to approach the fleet. You will be escorted back to Earth and turned over to the authorities for punishment. Do not attempt to touch your controls. Your ship is pinned. Have you a space-suit on?"

"No," said Keith. "But this is important. Does Mekky know I'm here? I must see him."

"Mekky knows you are here. He ordered us to englobe and capture you. Put on a space-suit so you can let the air out of your ship and open the lock. One of us will enter and take over operation of your ship."

"All right," Keith said, desperately, "but does Mekky—"

THE voice was different this time. It spoke both ways at once, strangely, inside his head *and* through the speaker on the instrument panel. It was Mekky's voice. It said, "Keith Winton, I told you not to come here."

Keith answered aloud. If the voice had come through the radio too, then Mekky was dealing the others in on the conversation and he might as well.

He said, "I had to come now or never, Mekky. The plans went wrong. I was being hunted down as a spy and you're the only one who *knows* I'm not. I wouldn't have lived a day longer on Earth."

"What is that to me? What is one life beside the defense of a solar system?"

"That's *why*," said Keith, trying to sound confident. "You know, from having studied my surface thoughts, that I'm from another universe. You've got a lot of things here in the way of science that we can't touch there. Space-travel and—and *you*, yourself. But how do you know we haven't got some things you've missed?

"You're in a jam here. You're afraid of the next Arc attack. How do you know, without searching deeply into my mind, that you won't find something there that may be worth a lot more than the little time you'd have to give me?"

A calm but youthful voice said, "Maybe he's got something there, Mekky. Why not bring him over to the fleet? What have we got to lose?" It was a youthful yet deep voice—there were authority and confidence in it.

Keith had never heard it before but he knew somehow that it must be Dopelle's voice—Dopelle, with whom Betty Hadley, *his* Betty Hadley, was so hopelessly in love. The great Dopelle who held this universe—except for the Arcturians—in the palm of his hand. The mighty Dopelle. "Damn him," Keith thought.

Mekky's voice again said, "All right. Bring him to the fleet. To the flagship."

There was dull knocking on the outside of the airlock. Keith unstrapped himself quickly from the pilot's seat. He said, "Just a minute. Getting a space-suit on."

It was thick and awkward to handle but there wasn't anything difficult about putting it on. The helmet clicked automatically into place against the neck-ring. He opened the valve in the airlock that would let the air inside the ship outside. He heard it hiss. When it quit hissing in a few seconds he opened the airlock.

A man wearing a space-suit bigger and more cumbersome than his came in. Without speaking he sat down in the pilot's seat and began to work the vernier controls. He stood up again and motioned to the airlock. Keith nodded and opened it; they were up against, almost touching, the side of a big ship. From so close, he couldn't tell how big it was.

An airlock stood open and Keith stepped across into the closed compartment to which it led. Of course, he realized, a ship this size

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couldn't exhaust all its air merely to let someone in at the airlocks. There'd be an intermediate chamber.

The outer door swung shut. Air hissed. The inner door swung open. A tall, very handsome young man with black hair and flashing black eyes stood there, just inside the inner door.

He stepped forward quickly and helped Keith take off the helmet. He said, "I'm Dopelle, and you're this Winton or Winston Mekky told me about. Hurry up and get that suit off." His voice was courageous, but worried. "We're in a jam. I hope you've got something we can use. Otherwise—"

Slipping out of the space-suit, Keith looked around him. The ship was big all right—the room he was in must be the main chamber. It was a hundred feet long by thirty or thirty-five wide. There were a lot of men in it, mostly working down at the far end of the room in what looked like a completely equipped experimental laboratory.

His eyes went back to Dopelle. There, just above Dopelle's head, hung Mekky, the basketball-sized sphere that was a mechanical brain.

Inside his head came Mekky's voice. "It could be, Keith Winton. Something about a potentiomotor. A man named Burton. Whatever it is, it's not known here. Do you know the details, the wiring diagram?

"Don't bother answering, just think. Yes, you've seen diagram and formula. You don't know them consciously but they're there in your subconscious. I think I can get to them under light hypnosis. You are willing?"

"Yes, of course," Keith said. "What's the score?"

"The score is this," said Dopelle, answering for Mekky. "The Arcs are going to attack soon. We don't know exactly when but it may be within hours. And they've got something new. We don't know how to buck it yet. It's a single ship, not a fleet—but their whole effort for years has gone into it. That's good, in one way. If we can destroy it the way will be clear for us to take the fleet to Arcturus and end the war. But—"

"But what?" Keith asked. "Is it too big for you to handle?"

DOPELLE waved a hand impatiently. "Size doesn't matter, although it's really a monster—ten thousand feet, ten times the biggest thing we've ever tried to build. But it's coated with a new metal, impervious to anything we know. We can A-bomb it all day and not scratch the finish."

Keith nodded. "We had that stuff, too—in our science-fiction magazines." He got the space-suit off as he finished speaking. "I used to edit one."

Dopelle's face lighted up. It was a nice face. Keith decided that—Betty Hadley regardless—he liked Dopelle. "I used to read them," Dopelle said, "when I was younger. Of course now—"

But something in the expression on Dopelle's face registered. He'd seen a face like it before, back—no, he hadn't seen the face, either. Just a photograph of it. A photograph of a younger and far less handsome edition. Dopelle was—

"*Joe Doppelberg!*" Keith said. His mouth fell open.

"What?" Dopelle's eyes were puzzled now. "What do you mean?"

"I know you now," Keith said. "I've got a clue to this set-up. You're *Joe Doppelberg*, a science-fiction fan of—of back there where I came from. Only you're older than he—and a thousand times handsomer and more intelligent than he and—you've got everything he wanted.

"You're what he would have dreamed himself to be. He—you—used to write me long letters, full of corny humor, to my Rocketalk Department, and you called me Rocky and you didn't like our Bems, and—"

He broke off and his mouth dropped open again.

Dopelle said, "Mekky, he's crazy. You won't get anything out of him. He's stark crazy."

"No," Mekky's voice said. "He isn't crazy. He's wrong of course but he isn't crazy. I can follow his thought processes and see why he thinks that. I can straighten him out on it. I see the whole thing now—except the formula and diagram we need.

"Come, Keith Winton, you must go under light hypnosis so I can get from your deep subconscious what I need. Then I'll tell you everything you want to know."

"How to get back?"

"Possibly. I'm not sure of that. But you will be doing a tremendous service. You may be the instrument of saving Earth from Arcturus—and Earth here is just as real as the one you know. You're not living in the dream of one of your science-fiction fans. I assure you of that.

"And that you may know what you're

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saving Earth from would you care to see an Arcturian?"

"Would I—why sure. Why not?"

"Follow."

The sphere that was Mekky floated across the room, and Keith followed. The voice was saying inside his head, "This is one we captured in a scouting ship. The first we captured alive since the early days of the war. It was from its mind—if you can call it a mind—that I learned of the monster ship that is to come, and of the new armament it will have. After you see it—"

A door swung open, revealing a steel-barred door just inside it and a cell beyond the steel bars. A light flashed on within the cell.

"That," said the voice of Mekky, "is an Arcturian."

Keith stepped closer to look through the bars and then he stepped back even more quickly. He felt as though he were going to be sick at his stomach. He closed his eyes and swayed dizzily. Horror and nausea almost blanked him out.

The steel door swung shut.

"That," said Mekky, "is an Arcturian in its own body. Maybe now you understand why Arcturian spies are shot on suspicion."

Keith cleared his throat. "Yes," he said.

"*That* is what will destroy the human race and populate the Solar System, unless we can destroy the monster ship. And time is short. Come, Keith Winton."

CHAPTER XV

Flashback

KEITH WINTON felt a little dazed. He felt as though he'd been drunk and were just sobering up, as though he'd been under ether and were just coming out. Yet it wasn't quite like that either. Though he felt physically lethargic his mind was clear, crystalline in fact. It was just that too much strong meat was being fed to it all at once. It was having difficulty absorbing more.

He sat on a little steel-railed balcony, looking out over the big room of Dopelle's space-ship, watching Dopelle and a varying number of other workmen swiftly and efficiently making something that looked like a very large and quite modified edition of something he'd seen a picture of in a science magazine back on Earth, his own Earth. It was a Burton potentiomotor.

The sphere that was Mekky floated above the operation, fifty feet away from Keith, but it was talking to Keith, in Keith's mind. Distance didn't make any difference, it seemed, to Mekky. And Keith had a hunch that Mekky was carrying on more than one of those telepathic conversations at the same time, that Mekky was directing Dopelle and the workmen even while he talked to Keith.

"You find it difficult to grasp, of course," Mekky's voice was saying. "Infinity is, in fact, impossible fully to grasp. Yet there are infinite universes."

"But *where?*" Keith's mind asked. "In parallel dimensions or what?"

"Dimension is merely an attribute of a universe," Mekky said, "having validity only within that particular universe. From otherwhere a universe—spatially infinite in itself—is but a point.

"There are an infinite number of points on the head of a pin. There are as many points on the head of a pin as in an infinite universe or an infinity of infinite universes. And infinity to the infinite power is still only infinity.

"There are, then, an infinite number of co-existent universes—including the one you came from and this one. But do you conceive what infinity means, Keith Winton?"

"Well—yes and no."

"It means that, out of infinity, *all conceivable* universes exist. There is, for instance, a universe in which this exact scene is being repeated except that you—or the equivalent of you—are wearing brown shoes instead of black ones.

"There are an infinite number of permutations of that variation, such as one in which you have a slight scratch on your left forefinger and one in which you have a dull headache and—"

"But they are all *me?*"

"No, none of them is you. I should not have used that pronoun. They are separate individual entities—just as the Keith Winton of this universe is a separate entity from you. In this particular variation, there is a wide physical difference—no resemblance, in fact.

"But you and your prototype here had roughly the same history. And, as you found out to your sorrow, you wrote the same stories once. And there are similarities be-

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tween my master Dopelle here and a science-fiction fan named Doppelberg in your universe but they are *not* the same person."

Keith thought slowly, "If there are infinite universes, then all possible combinations must exist. Then, somewhere, *everything must be true*. I mean, it would be impossible to write a fiction story, because no matter how wild it sounds that very thing must be happening somewhere. Is that true?"

"Of course it's true. There is a universe in which Huckleberry Finn is a real person, doing the exact things Mark Twain described him as doing. There are, in fact, an infinite number of universes in which a Huckleberry Finn is doing every possible variation of what Mark Twain *might* have described him as doing. No matter what variation, major or minor, Mark Twain might have made in the writing of that book it would have been true."

Keith Winton's mind staggered a little. He said, "There are an infinite number of universes in which we—or our equivalents—are making Burton outfits to defeat attacking Arcturians? And in some of them we'll succeed and in others we'll fail?"

"Of course. And there are an infinite number of universes in which we don't exist at all. In which the human race does not exist. There are an infinite number of universes in which flowers are the predominant form of life. Infinite universes in which—in which the states of existence are such that we have no words to describe them. *All possible combinations must exist in infinity.*

"There are an infinite number of universes in which you're going to die in the next half hour, piloting a rocket against the monster ship from Arcturus."

"What?"

"Of course. You're going to ask to. It may get you back to your own universe. You want to get there. I can see it in your mind. Don't ask me if you will succeed in this particular universe. I cannot read the future."

AGAIN Keith shook his head. There were still a million questions though he could figure the answers to some of them himself. But he asked another one first.

"Explain again, please, what happened. How I got here."

"The moon rocket from your Earth must have fallen back and exploded—the Burton effect, that is. It isn't exactly an explosion—when it struck Earth on L. A. Borden's estate a few yards from you. There are peculiar properties to such an electrical flash. Burton didn't know what he had. Anyone caught in it directly is *not* killed. He's knocked into another universe."

"How can you know that if the Burton effect is new here?"

"Partly by deduction from what happened to you, partly by analysis—deeper than was given it on your Earth—of the Burton formula. You're *here*. Q. E. D. And, from your mind, I can see why out of an infinity of universes you landed in this particular one."

"Why?"

"Because you were thinking about this particular universe at the instant the rocket struck. You were thinking about your science-fiction fan, Joe Doppelberg, and you were wondering what kind of a universe he would dream about, what kind he would like. And this is it.

"Analyze the differences and you'll see they fit, all of them. You didn't think this universe up, Keith Winton. It existed. It's real. Any universe you might have been thinking of would have existed, ready for you to be blown into by the Burton flash."

"I—understand," Keith Winton said.

It answered a lot of things. Yes, *this* was the kind of universe Joe Doppelberg would have thought of and dreamed of—with a romanticized hero named Dopelle practically running it, saving it. It even answered a lot of little details.

Joe Doppelberg had been at the Borden office. He'd seen Betty Hadley and probably been smitten by her. And so here Betty was in love with Dopelle. Joe knew *of* Keith Winton, had corresponded with him and had a mental picture of him, so there was *a* Keith Winton here.

"But Joe hadn't ever seen Keith Winton—he'd been out of New York the day of Joe's call—so the physical picture wasn't accurate. Joe had seen Borden, so Borden was here—but Joe didn't know of Borden's Greeneville estate and there hadn't happened to be a Greeneville estate here.

"It all fitted—even to the improvement of the Bems on the covers of *Surprising Stories*—bug-eyed monsters with the subtle horror that Doppelberg demanded in them.

A crazy Earth with everyday automobiles—and space-ships, too. Black adventure at night on Manhattan Island—and intergalac-

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tic warfare. A Moon with air on it—and a super-marvelous mechanical brain as Dopelle had created it. Dopelle the super man, the only man who'd been to Arcturus and come back alive. Dopelle who was almost single-handed saving the solar system.

Universe *à la* Doppelberg! It fitted—everything fitted. It had to be.

The men in the big room down below the balcony were now putting the finishing touches on the thing they were making—a thing of complicated coils that still somewhat resembled the pictures he'd seen once of a Burton potentiomotor. Apparently Mekky had finished his telepathed instructions to them.

Mekky floated up to the balcony now and hovered near Keith's shoulder. In Keith's mind, he said, "They're installing it on a life-boat, a rocket-propelled craft. Someone must take the life-raft out and run it around a while until a tremendous charge is built up in the Burton apparatus. Then it will hover near the fleet until the monster ship from Arcturus materializes here to destroy us. They have the same space-drive we have.

"Then the life-raft must crash the monster. The Arc ship is inertialess. Any other ship we have can crash it without hurting it. Nothing in our armaments can touch it. It will blaze a path of death and destruction through the planets after it has destroyed our fleet. Unless the Burton apparatus—which is new to them as to us—can destroy it."

"Can it, though?"

"You'll know when you crash the life-raft into it. Yes, you will be given the privilege. Every man in the fleet would volunteer. Dopelle himself would love to do it but I talked him into letting you. I knew from your mind that you'd want to take the chance. It will—I believe—get you back to your own universe.

"The life-raft isn't a raft, of course. That's just a nickname for it. It's a small rocket-propelled ship. You've never seen one. I shall implant knowledge of its operation in your mind before you enter it. And you know what to do before the crash."

"What?"

"Concentrate on your own world. On a specific part of it; possibly on the very spot where you were a week ago when the moon rocket hit you. But not on that time, of course—upon that place in that universe, as of now.

"You don't want to get back there just in time to be blown away again by the moon rocket's landing. From there you can go to New York—the New York *you* know. And to Betty Hadley—*your* Betty Hadley."

Keith reddened a little. There was a disadvantage to having one's mind read that thoroughly even by a mechanical brain.

The men were wheeling off the thing they had made.

"Will it take them long to install it in the rocket?" he asked.

"Only minutes. Relax now and close your eyes, Keith Winton. I'll implant in your mind the knowledge of how to control a rocket-propelled craft."

Keith Winton closed his eyes and relaxed . . .

THE life-raft hovered, ten thousand miles out from Saturn. A thousand miles from the Earth fleet. Keith could see the fleet in his visiplate, hundreds of ships of all sizes, the might of the Solar System, yet helpless against the thing to come.

And he, alone in this tiny cigar-shaped rocket only thirty feet long by six in circumference, could do what the whole fleet couldn't—he hoped. Well, Mekky thought it would work and Mekky would know if anybody or anything would know. No use worrying about it. It would work or it wouldn't and, if it didn't, he wouldn't live to worry.

He tested the controls, sending the rocket in a tight little circle only a mile across, coming back and to a dead stop at the point at which he'd started. A difficult maneuver but easy for him now. *"The Ole Rocketeer,"* he thought. "If my fans of the Rocketalk Department could only see me now." He grinned.

Inside his head, Mekky's voice said, "It's coming. I feel ether vibrations."

He looked hard at the visiplate. There was a black dot just off the center of it. He touched the controls, got the dot on dead center and slammed on all the rockets, full power.

The black dot grew, slowly at first, then filled the screen. He was going to hit it in a second now. Quickly, desperately, he remembered to concentrate on Earth, *his* Earth, on the spot near Greeneville, New York. On Betty Hadley. On currency in sensible dollars and cents and night life on

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Broadway without the mist-out, on everything he'd known.

A series of pictures flashed through his mind, as is supposed to be the case with a drowning man. "But—Lord," he thought, "Why didn't I think of it sooner? It doesn't have to be exactly like that. I can make a few improvements. I can pick a universe almost exactly like mine but with a few differences that would make it better, such as—

The rocket hit the monster ship, dead center. There was a blinding flash.

Again there was no sense of a time lapse. Keith Winton was again lying flat on the ground and it was early evening. There were stars in the sky and a moon. It was a half-moon, he noticed, not the crescent moon of last Saturday evening.

He looked down and around him. He was in the middle of a big charred and blackened area. Not far away were the foundations of what had been a house, and he recognized the size and shape of it. He recognized the blackened stump of a tree beside him. Things looked as though the explosion and fire had occurred almost a week ago. "Good," he thought. "Back at the right time and place."

He stood up and stretched, feeling a bit stiff from his confinement in the little rocketship.

He walked out to the road, still feeling a bit uneasy. *Why* had he let his mind wander a trifle just at the last minute. He could have made a mistake doing that. What if—?

A truck was coming along and he hailed it, getting a lift into Greeneville. The driver was taciturn. They didn't talk at all on the way in.

Keith thanked him as he got off at the main square of town. He ran quickly to the newsstand to look at the headline of the current newspaper displayed there. "Giants Beat Bums," it read. Keith sighed with relief.

He realized he'd been sweating until he'd seen that headline. He wiped perspiration off his forehead and went into the newsstand. "Got a copy of *Surprising Stories?*" he asked.

"Right here, sir."

He glanced at the cover, at the familiar cover, saw that it said 20c, and not 2cr. Again he sighed with relief—until he reached for change in his pocket and remembered there wasn't any there. And there'd be only credit bills—a few of them—in his wallet. No use pulling that out.

Embarrassed, he handed the magazine back. "Sorry," he said. "Just realized I came away without any money."

"Oh, that's all right, Mr. Winton," the proprietor said. "Pay me any time. And—uh—if you came away without your money could I lend you some? Would ten dollars help?"

"It surely would," Keith said. "Thanks a lot. Uh—make it nine-eighty, so I'll owe you an even ten with the magazine."

"Sure. Gee, I'm glad to see you, Mr. Winton. We thought you were killed when the rocket hit. All the papers said so."

"Of course," Keith thought. "That's how he knows me. My picture would have been in the papers as one of Borden's visitors who was killed."

"Glad to say the newspapers got it wrong," he told the man. "Thanks a lot."

HE POCKETED the nine dollars and eighty cents, and went out again. It was getting to be dusk, just as it had been before on last Saturday night. Well, now to—now to what? He couldn't phone Borden.

Borden was dead—or maybe blown into another universe. Keith hoped it was the latter. Had the Bordens and the others who'd been on the estate, been near enough the center of the flash to have had that happen to them? He hoped so.

An unpleasant memory made him walk past the corner drugstore where—it seemed like years ago—he'd seen his first purple Bem. He went into the drugstore on the next corner and walked back to the phone booth. Often someone worked late in the Borden offices in New York. Maybe somebody would be working there now. If not, all the call would cost him would be a report charge.

He got a handful of change from the druggist and went back to the phone booth. How did one dial a long distance operator on a Greeneville phone? He picked up the Greeneville directory to find out and idly leafed it open to the B's first. The last time he'd handled one of these things there hadn't been any L. A. Borden listed.

This time, of course—just to reassure himself, he ran his finger down the column. There wasn't any L. A. Borden.

For just a minute, he leaned against the

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back of the phone booth and closed his eyes. Then he looked again. Had some embryonic thoughts gone through his mind at the last minute and brought him back to a universe not quite the same as the one he left?

Quickly he yanked the copy of *Surprising Stories* out of his pocket and opened it to the title page. He ran his finger to the point in the fine print where—*Ray Wheeler, Managing Editor,* it read. Not Keith Winton but Ray Wheeler. Who the devil was Ray Wheeler?

Quickly his eyes swung to the name of the publisher—and it didn't read Borden Publications, Inc., at all. It read *Winton Publications, Inc.* It took him a full five seconds to figure out where he'd heard the name of Winton before. Then he grabbed for the phone book again and looked under the W's. There was a Keith Winton listed, Cedarburg Road, and a familiar phone number, Greeneville 111.

No wonder the newsdealer had known him, then. And he *had* changed things somewhat and somehow with those last minute thoughts in the rocket ship. This was almost the same universe but not quite. In it *Keith Winton* owned one of the biggest chains of publications in the country and had owned a Greeneville estate!

But what else—if anything?

He put a coin in the phone and said quickly, "Long distance, please," before he remembered it was a dial phone.

His hands fumbled the directory before he could find out how to get a long distance operator.

Then he got one, and said, "New York, please. Have the New York operator see if there is a Betty Hadley listed and get her for me if there is. Quickly, please."

A few minutes later— "Your party, sir." And then Betty's cool voice saying, Hello."

"Betty, this is Keith Winton. I—"

"*Keith!* We thought you—the papers said—what happened?"

"Guess I must have been in the explosion, Betty, but at the edge of it and just got knocked out. I must have had amnesia from the shock and been wandering around. I just came to myself. I'm in Greeneville?"

"Oh, Keith, that's wonderful! It's—I just can't say it! You're coming right to New York?"

"As soon as a plane will get me there. Want to meet me at La Guardia field?"

"Do I *want* to? Oh, *darling*!"

And a moment later, Keith Winton—with a dazed and somewhat silly look on his face—put the receiver on the hook and hurried out of the drugstore. A taxi to the airport and then—

This, he thought, was a universe he'd really settle for.

Next Issue's Novel: AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT, by Arthur C. Clarke

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Bruce fired, and the bullet ripped a metal insigne from the shoulder of the Cafis Goa

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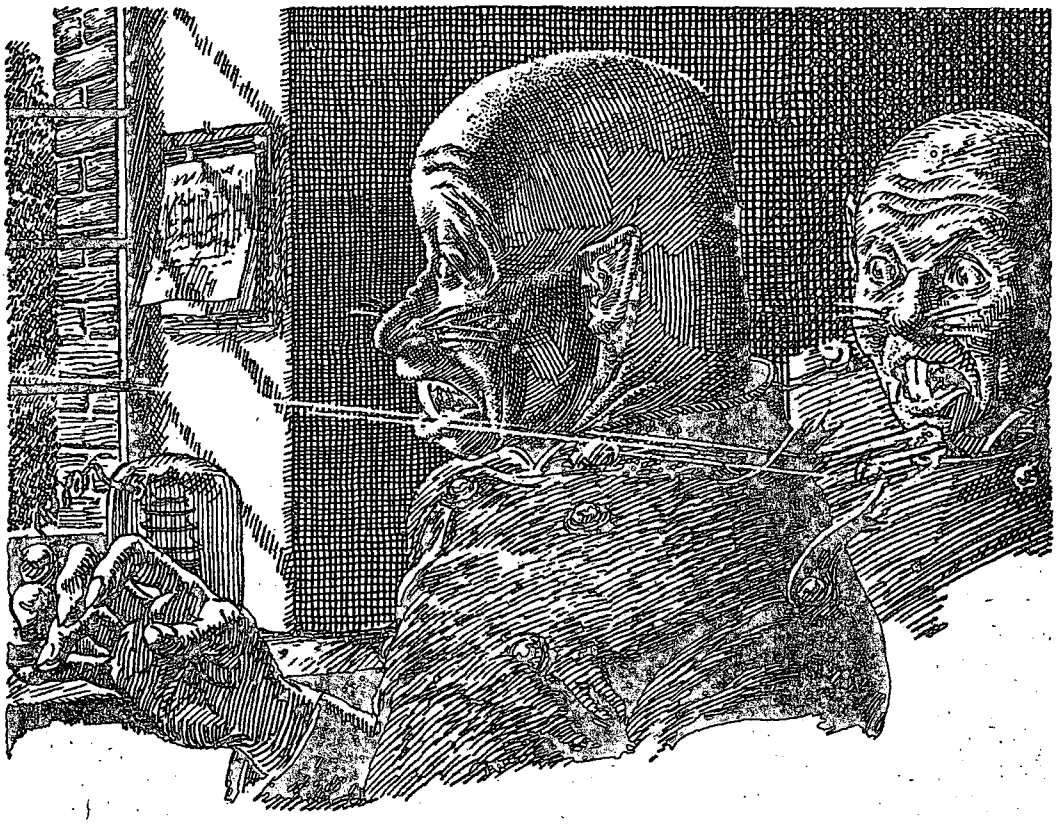

RAT RACE

By DOROTHY and JOHN DE COURCY

The Rat-men's empire spread ever outward until it engulfed the world in a paralysis of total terror

LOIS MACDONALD opened the door of the laboratory. Her husband, Bruce, and Dr. Granas were studying something intently.

"It's six o'clock, Bruce," she called from the doorway.

Bruce looked up from the table. "Already?" he asked, surprised.

Dr. Granas stretched. "That's the way it is, Bruce. Time seems to slip through a man's fingers when he's doing something."

Bruce walked across the room. "Well, we might as well hear what he has to say and get it over with." He snapped on the televisor and walked back to the sink. The two men washed their hands and dried them, occasionally glancing at the screen.

The orchestra that had been playing vanished to be replaced by the solemn face of an announcer. "Ladies and Gentlemen. This is Malcolm Field, speaking to you from the United Nations Government Building in Geneva. Through the cooperation of the European Broadcasting Alliance, we bring you a special address by United States Delegate, Avery B. Clark."

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The scene shifted and the usually tragic face of Delegate Clark appeared looking more dejected than usual. He cleared his throat.

"My fellow citizens. There are few of you, if any, who do not know of the momentous events of these last four days. You have heard, as did I, the surrender ultimatum of the Cafis. Yesterday, we experienced the type of warfare which we can expect if we are to resist.

"For one hour, it was as if our civilization did not exist and we were returned to the Stone Age. The official emissary of the Cafis explained the principle of this weapon and has shown how it is applied, yet none of our scientists, either professional or amateur, has been able to find a way to combat this weapon. The Cafis have informed us that this only one of many such weapons and each is equally potent.

"This is not war as we of earth have known war, but it is war none the less. The Cafis are an alien race and therefore a peculiar one. If they had wished, they could have attacked us without warning and by now, we would all be dead.

"My fellow delegates and I have felt the grave responsibility resting upon us and we have considered the facts carefully. If I were deciding for myself alone, I would say, fight! Fight to the end! I would have nothing of greater value to risk than my life and my honor. But, I have had to decide for you, for your wives, for your fathers and mothers, for your husbands and for your children.

"Therefore, I have made the only decision possible. It is the unanimous decision of the United Nations Government that we accept the ultimatum, 'surrender without condition.' The surrender will take effect at seven o'clock tonight, Eastern Standard Time. From then on, we will be subjects of the Galactic Empire of Cafis, and we will be expected to govern ourselves accordingly."

DELEGATE CLARK paused, his lower lip trembling. "Good-by and God be with you," he finished hastily.

Bruce turned the televisor off. He looked at Granas and then at his wife. "Hello, fellow slaves," he said, grinning.

"It's not funny, Bruce!" Lois snapped and buried her face in her hands. Bruce went to her side and put his arms around her.

"I wonder what we do now?" Dr. Granas asked of no one in particular.

"I'm afraid I don't know, Uncle Bob," Bruce answered. "I haven't had much experience at this sort of thing."

"Is—isn't there something we can do?" Lois burst forth, desperately. "Maybe—maybe if there was more electricity—"

Dr. Granas shook his head. "If you were a scientist, Lois, you'd understand. This thing can't be beaten. You've seen condensers and you know how simple they are. The weapon of the Cafis is almost the same as a condenser. They created two electrostatic fields of unimaginable intensity which encompassed the earth outside the atmosphere. This in turn, converted the earth into a non-unified stress field and isn't entirely understood."

"But—but how does it work?" Lois asked. "Surely there is some way to combat it!"

Dr. Granas smiled. "Well, any electrical activity, no matter how slight, acting in this field, instantly sets up a counter potential of almost equal pressure. It would take billions of horsepower to operate even the devices in the house. The earth simply hasn't got the available power to overcome this potential, and even if it did, we would be defeating ourselves in using it since the Cafis draw their power directly from the sun.

"Why, there would be such a tremendous amount of heat released here on Earth that it would destroy all life within a matter of hours. Even if we surmounted that obstacle, the Cafis would be draining so much power from the sun that in a few weeks, it would become unstable and might even explode into a super-nova.

"We would then literally be jumping from the frying pan into the fire. There might be another way but we simply haven't the technology and knowledge to find it or use it. In a hundred years we might, but not now."

Lois nodded dejectedly. They just sat disconsolately in the laboratory. There was nothing to say; nothing to do but wait.

Finally, Dr. Granas glanced at the clock. "Thirty-eight more minutes of freedom," he sighed. "Thirty-eight more precious minutes and I have nothing to do."

Bruce roused himself. "Do you remember that bottle of Napoleon brandy you gave us two years ago?" Dr. Granas nodded. "Well, it seems to me," Bruce continued, "that it's still in the refrigerator."

Lois looked up. "It's still there, darling. Shall I get it?"

"I think it would be a good idea," Bruce

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said. "Take it into the living room, dear, and I'll get the goblets."

In the living room, Bruce carefully divided what was left of the brandy into three goblets. He set the bottle down and silently handed glasses to Lois and her Uncle Bob. They stood facing each other, Bruce slightly swirling the brandy in his glass.

Dr. Granas again glanced at the clock. "Ladies and gentlemen," he began, oratorically, "since this is my last twenty-seven minutes of freedom. I offer a toast. To the United Nations, to the United States, and to—tomorrow morning. May I wake up and find this is all a dream."

Lois bit her lip as the glasses tinkled. They fell silent again after the toast, each counting the minutes and having in them, thoughts too private to share.

Soon, Granas walked over to the televisor. He turned. "Shall I turn it on?" he asked, hesitantly.

"Let's wait until seven," Lois suggested. "We're free to do as we please until then."

"Maybe it would be better," Granas agreed. "I imagine the 'rats' will have us listening every day to propaganda broadcasts from now on."

"You're going to have to watch out for that word in the future, Uncle Bob," Bruce said. "They may be rodents but they're also our bosses."

Lois shuddered. "They do look like rats," she interposed. "I think they're horrible!"

BRUCE replied, "You know, I think we're being illogical. They don't really look like rats. They don't have any fur. If it weren't for their teeth and that bottlelike shape, they could easily pass themselves off as men. We humans have some sort of a natural aversion for rodents, particularly rats, but after all, just because they're rodents instead of primates doesn't mean they are vicious. I think they've treated us quite well, so far."

"We still don't know what they're going to do," Dr. Granas said, caustically.

"I wonder how such a terrible life form happened to become a dominant animal?" Lois asked.

"Oh, it's logical enough," Dr. Granas answered. "It's really only an accident that a primate like man became dominant here. On the whole, rodentia are intelligent, and they are certainly prolific. By all rights they should have developed here. Even as it is, we have a great deal of trouble saving civilization from rats. They have lived with us everywhere and have practically defied our every attempt to get rid of them."

"Oh let's not talk about them any more," Lois exclaimed. "They make my skin crawl!"

"All right," Dr Granas answered. "Maybe we should be watching the televisor. The Cafis will probably have plenty to say."

"I guess I'll go to bed," Lois said. "I don't think I could stand seeing those awful rat faces again."

Bruce kissed her. "I'll be up soon, dear, and don't worry. Everything will be all right."

Lois smiled and nodded her head, but Bruce could see that she wasn't convinced.

Dr. Granas waited until Lois was gone and then snapped on the televisor. A well-known commentator was reviewing the events of the preceding four days, augmented by recorded scenes.

". . . more than industrial paralysis. In homes and offices, these scenes were typical."

The scene shifted to show a young woman snapping on switches and plugging in appliances all over her house. Nothing worked. The scene changed to an office where a young man smilingly demonstrated an inoperative adding machine. The young man picked up a flashlight and snapped on the switch. Nothing happened.

The commentator's voice broke in. "These scenes are in no way exaggerated as you all know. Although we have not yet received the final reports, preliminary surveys show that all types of electrical equipment, no matter where situated, were blanked out during the one hour test yesterday."

"The Cafis emissary, Atis Tobe, declared that if the weapon had been stepped to a higher degree, it would have also prevented the travel of light and heat. Incidentally, we were able to make these recordings by using mechanical motion picture devices and so the stoppage had no effect."

He paused. "That's about all the time we have left. There will be further bulletins every hour unless the Cafis begin censorship of news. And now we take you to the New York News Bureau."

"Now what?" Dr. Cranas asked.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. This is Marvin Hill. Our New York News Bureau has become more or less the center of attention during the last twenty minutes. The

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Cafis Gan, Atis Tobe, has landed in New York and has requested a hookup for a nationwide broadcast. Reports are coming in indicating that similar broadcasts will take place in Europe and Asia. Official emissaries of the Cafis have established headquarters in London, Paris, Moscow, Madrid, Rome and Istanbul.

"We have a tentative report from Shanghai but it has not yet been verified. It appears that simultaneous broadcasts which will cover the whole world will begin in a very few minutes. Indications are that New York will be the new seat of government at least temporarily. We are preparing— That's the signal, ladies and gentlemen. We take you to the Municipal Building."

"I wish they wouldn't be so cheerful," Bruce muttered. "You'd think this was the Fourth of July or something!"

A NEW face appeared on the screen. "Good evening ladies and gentlemen of the United States," the face intoned. "This is Kimball Trent. We are bringing you a special address by the Viceroy of the Cafis Empire, Atis Tobe." He paused, significantly. "Viceroy Tobe."

The face and shoulders of the Viceroy came into view. "So that's the number one rat," Dr. Granas mumbled. Bruce thought Atis Tobe was staring directly at Dr. Granas. At least, it looked as though he were. A man's voice was heard in the background. "You're on the air, Your Excellency."

"Thank you," the Viceroy said with a slight lisp. With beady eyes he stared from the screen and twitched his nose a little. The whiskers on the side of his nose were trimmed close and even, looking very much like an out-of-place mustache. His ears were small and except for the bulging forehead, he looked very much like a hairless rat. Even his voice was high pitched and somewhat squeaky.

"I bring greetings to the most recently acquired of the Cafis Empire. Although you have surrendered and are technically a subject race, may I assure you that your status is that of citizens in our great Empire."

"Soft soap!" Bruce growled.

"As fellow citizens," the Cafis Gan continued, "I feel we should understand one another. I am sure that a few of you are harboring some misconceptions regarding us. Possibly I do also regarding you. We have studied your planet for only four days and most of our energy and resources have been devoted to the study of your languages. It has been difficult but we have mastered them sufficiently to adequately express our desires. By induction, we have been able to formulate a reasonably accurate picture of the average inhabitant of this planet.

"That you are creatures of logic is obvious, since you have surrendered rather than tried to resist the inevitable. That you are civilized is plain, not only from your technology but from your attitude toward us, an alien race. Because of these things, I am safe in assuring you that you will soon be granted full citizenship in the Cafis Empire with all its rights and privileges."

Dr. Granas snorted. "He hasn't gathered what our attitude really is! His hide must be a foot thick!"

They listened to a glowing dissertation on the benefits of citizenship in the Cafis Empire. The inducements were purely intellectual and carried not even a residue of emotional appeal.

"Cold blooded little beggars!" the doctor growled.

"There are a few prerequisites to obtaining citizenship, however," the Viceroy went on, "but since these conditions are logically necessary, I confidently expect your full cooperation."

At this point, the Cafis Gan attempted a grin. Seldom had Bruce seen a more revolting spectacle. The Viceroy decided he had grinned enough and continued his speech.

"In order to coordinate technology, it is necessary that all scientists and technicians be registered. If then, you are engaged in one or more of the following professions, full or part time, you will go to the nearest center of local government and there leave your name, address and other such data as you will be asked by those in charge of the registration. Registration will begin tomorrow morning at eight o'clock and will continue until the registration is complete."

THE Viceroy began reading off the names of various sciences, arts and crafts with monotonous intonations. When he reached 'Biologist', Bruce stirred and mumbled something inaudibly. Shortly after that came 'Chemist'.

"I see I'm in this too," Dr. Granas sighed.

They listened while the Cafis Gan finished his list. Then he favored his audience with another smile. He laid down several more

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edicts which were not too restrictive and suggested that it was desirable that each person conduct himself in his most normal manner.

"Business as usual during altercations!" Dr. Granas gritted.

The Viceroy stopped speaking and turned his head. He made a motion to someone, and his face vanished to be replaced by that of a local announcer.

Dr. Granas reached over and switched off the televiser. "Well, Bruce, I wonder how many times a minute they would like to have us breathe!"

Bruce didn't move. He just stared at the blank screen.

"What do you think we should do now?" Dr. Granas asked.

Still Bruce didn't stir.

"What's the matter, boy? Are you hypnotized or something?"

"Huh? Oh. What did you say, Uncle Bob?"

"I said, are you hypnotized?"

"Ah—oh no. It was just that profile."

"Well," Granas smiled, "I can't say that it's any more repugnant than a full face view."

"No, I mean—" Bruce paused. "Oh, I don't know." He sighed. "Let it go."

"I've been thinking, Bruce. If we get downtown early tomorrow, we may not have to wait long to register."

"Yeah, I suppose so," Bruce answered, "but if you feel up to it, I'd like to do a little work tonight. The only thing we have to do is connect up the amplifying circuits."

"It's all right with me," Dr. Granas replied. "We can start testing tomorrow then."

"That reminds me," Bruce interrupted. "In order to energize the colloid, we'll have to feed a variable current into the input amplifier."

"Yes," Dr. Granas nodded. "The more variable, the better."

"Well, how about this idea," Bruce suggested. "Let's hook a microphone up to the input and stand it in front of the loudspeaker of the lab's televisor. That would really give us variation. We can keep it turned on low enough so it won't bother anyone."

"Sometimes, Bruce, you get the darnedest ideas," Dr. Granas chuckled. "I guess you're just naturally lazy. There's nothing like letting the broadcasting company energize the colloid for us!"

"Do you think it'll work?" Bruce asked.

"I don't see why not. There's nothing wrong with it."

The two men went into the laboratory and set to work on the final connections.

Forty-five minutes later, Bruce laid down his soldering iron. "Pretty much Goldburgish but the output is O.K."

"You all done?" Granas asked.

"Yup, she's all hooked up. Do you want me to help you?"

"No, I'm done too. The circulation pump looks kind of crude but I'll give it the 'Granas' personal guarantee."

Bruce walked over to a cabinet and took out a small microphone. As he walked back, he unwound the cord and plugged it into the calculator's input amplifying circuit. They finally got the microphone properly propped up in front of the televisor. As Granas tuned in a program, Bruce stuck two test leads into the innards of the tube circuit.

"A little more volume, Uncle Bob. There, that's about right."

Dr. Granas straightened and grinned. "Well, shall we go to bed and let the 'MacDonald automatic energizing system' do the work for us?"

Bruce stuck his ear next to the loudspeaker attached to the calculator's output.

"What do you expect to hear, Bruce?"

"Oh, nothing. I just couldn't resist it. By tomorrow we should have a pretty good echo coming through."

"I hope you're right, my boy," Dr. Granas replied. "If we don't, we will have wasted a lot of time and money."

"Under the present circumstances," Bruce said, slipping off his lab coat, "I don't see that it makes much difference how much money we lose."

"No use being bitter," Granas retorted. "It isn't going to do the Cafis any harm or you any good."

"I guess you're right," Bruce sighed.

The two men left the laboratory. Dr. Granas paused at the stairway. "You go ahead, Bruce. I forgot to shut the lights off."

"O.K. Good night."

"Pleasant dreams, fellow Roman!"

Bruce went upstairs. Lois was asleep so he undressed quietly and eased himself into bed.

BREAKFAST was a dismal ritual. Dr. Granas made two or three ineffectual attempts to relieve the oppression. Lois was obviously depressed, but Bruce seemed de-

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tached, preoccupied, and his face wore the same expression of philosophic calm it had the night before.

"What have I done? Why won't you talk to me?" Dr. Granas asked.

"I'm sorry, Uncle Bob," Lois sighed. "I don't mean to be rude."

"Oh, it isn't that," Granas smiled. "I know you aren't trying to be rude, but it worries me when you don't talk."

"Is a woman always supposed to be talking?" Lois asked, smiling.

"Of course not," Granas answered, "but I know you too well. You're letting this thing get you, and you can't hide it."

"I'm sorry I'm—just—oh—I guess I'm not used to being a slave!"

"I know it's unpleasant," Granas admitted, "but there's nothing we can do about it, and as people have always done, we'll just have to grin and bear it. Come on, Bruce! Stop brooding!" The older man laid a friendly hand on Bruce's shoulder.

"Huh?"

"I said, cheer up!"

Bruce sighed. "Oh I'm not depressed. I've just been thinking."

"Well, you can do your thinking when we get back. It's almost time to leave. We want to get downtown before a line forms so we can get home earlier."

"Would you like some more coffee before you go?" Lois asked.

"I don't think so, dear," Bruce answered. "Uncle Bob is right."

"Bruce, you're getting to be a cynic, just like your father," Granas said.

"Maybe I am but I've got better reasons than he had."

Dr. Granas arose. "Let's get going. We can talk on the way to town."

Lois followed the two men into the hall. She took her coat out of the closet while Bruce was tying his tie.

"You aren't going too, are you?" Bruce asked.

"I most certainly am!" she replied.

"Oh there isn't any necessity for that, darling. This is only a registration. We're only going downtown and we'll be right back."

"I don't trust them, any of them!" she stated. "If you go, I go too!"

Bruce opened his mouth to object, then, finding no logical reason, let it go. "All right, dear. Maybe we'll take in a show or something afterward."

"Not today, we won't!" Granas interposed. "It has taken us two years to build our calculator and today we're going to test it!"

"I'm not so sure I want to test it," Bruce replied, opening the door. "After all, our work is supposed to be dedicated to humanity. Now we'll be giving it to the rats."

"I doubt if we'll be giving much away, Bruce, but in any case, this might be valuable later on. Our calculator might find a method of counteracting that electro-stasis field of the rats."

"I don't see how!" Bruce commented as he slammed the car door.

GRANAS answered. "I don't mean ours. I mean a later development. Suppose in ten years from now, an electro-colloidal calculator built on our principal, were given all the data on that stasis field, for example, a formula with an inoperative generator stated as part of the equation. Wouldn't the brain carry the formula to its logical conclusion? After all, an adding machine doesn't have to understand the term, two plus two.

"That's all just wishful thinking," Bruce replied. "A problem as complex as that would at least call for comprehension or awareness."

"It's only your mind that tells you that," Dr. Granas insisted. "In a sense, our colloid calculator does have awareness. There is always a continuous flow of impulses between all the cells, through the main inductors. You might say quite accurately that it thinks."

"Well, here we are," Bruce interrupted. "I'll let you two out and park the car."

"We'll wait in front of the building!" Lois called.

"All right!"

Ten minutes later, Bruce walked swiftly up to the entrance of the building. "I don't see a line waiting," Bruce smiled. "Have the rats lost their popularity so soon?"

"I wish you'd be serious, Bruce," Lois cautioned. "I don't think this is the least bit funny!"

"Maybe not, maybe not," Bruce replied as they walked into the building.

A policeman gave them directions and they soon found their way to the registration office. Dr. Granas picked out one of the interviewing desks at which no one was waiting. An oldish man was being interviewed

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by a uniformed Cafis.

"Shall I go first?" Granas asked, "or do you want to?"

"It doesn't matter to me," Bruce shrugged. "Go ahead."

The oldish man arose and left the desk. Dr. Granas sat down in the chair and Bruce stood behind him.

The Cafis glanced up from the desk and looked at Bruce. "If you will have a chair over there, young man, I will be with you as soon as I have finished with this gentleman's interview."

"We work together," Dr. Granas remarked. "He might be able to give you information that I can't."

"I see," the Cafis said. "If you will draw up a chair, then, we will proceed." The rodent busied himself with some blanks then stared at Dr. Granas. "State your name, age and place of residence please."

"Doctor Robert Granas, fifty-four, thirty-four-o-three Hudson Terrace."

"Your profession."

"Bio-chemist."

"By whom are you employed?"

"We are doing independent research."

"State the nature of it briefly, please."

"We are preparing a biological calculator utilizing a colloid substance which responds to electrical stimulae in known patterns. We—"

"Doctor, you are attempting to mislead us. You are making an artificial brain."

"Only by a very broad definition could you call it a brain, sir," Granas answered.

"Let me describe the device to you, Doctor," the Cafis said. "This device is fundamentally a tank, divided into tiny insulated compartments. Each compartment has a small opening between itself and all of its immediate neighbors. You have horizontal rods or wires and vertical rods or wires passing through the tank but not directly connected to the cells.

"It seems, by induction, these pick up the tiny impulses. You have an energizing solution slowly filtering through the colloid mass which forms the third pole of your primary electrical system. Connected to this are appropriate amplifiers, integrators and/or various other devices which utilize the output of the brain."

Dr. Granas listed to this recital open mouthed. "But—but—how could you know! How could you possibly know!!"

"From my position, Doctor Granas, it is quite simple but I am sorry that I can not tell you. I must, however, ask you to stop all work on this device. Our technicians will call at your laboratory this afternoon. You are not to do any further work until you receive their permission." Without waiting for a reply, he turned to Bruce. "Your name, age and place of residence, please."

"Bruce MacDonald, thirty-one, same address. I'm a biologist and I plan to leave here at once, return to our laboratory and work unceasingly until our device, as you call it, is finished! I wouldn't advise you or any of your friends to try and stop me."

"Mr. MacDonald. You are being irrational."

"And I plan to go right on being irrational! Any attempt at interference and I shall resort to violence. In case you don't realize what I mean, I will break bones and destroy lives if necessary!"

BRUCE jerked the appalled Granas to his feet and catching Lois by the arm, marched them out of the building. Lois was pale and Dr. Granas trembled a little. Bruce, however, took no notice of anything. Grimly, he led them up the street. No attempt was made to stop them. A few minutes later, they climbed into the car and drove homeward in silence.

As Bruce was unlocking the door, Lois whispered. "Bruce, why did you do it? Now they'll kill us all."

"I've been thinking about that," Bruce said, quietly. "I wondered if I'd made the biggest mistake of my life and possibly my last one—but I don't think so. The more I think about it, the more I'm sure I handled the situation in the only way possible."

"By losing your temper, I suppose!"

"And our lives in the balance!" Granas added.

"No, you two! They aren't going to do a thing to us!" Bruce answered. "I think—"

"And you'd better think fast too!" Granas interrupted, "because there's a car stopping out in front."

Lois dashed to the window. "Oh Bruce, they've come!" she sobbed. "What'll we do!"

The trio fell silent as two of the aliens emerged from the car, said something to the human driver, and walked measuredly toward the door. Bruce opened it for them and they stepped in without comment. Granas' eyes widened as he recognized the face

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and dress of the Capis Gan.

The Viceroy turned and faced Bruce. "I am the Cafis Gan. My name is Atis Tobe. You are, I believe, Bruce MacDonald."

"I am," Bruce admitted, trying not to smile.

"Something amuses you, Mr. MacDonald?" the observing Cafis asked.

"Yes," Bruce answered. "I'm more or less amused to see that I guessed correctly."

The Cafis Gan regarded him with an unwinking stare. "You have declined to follow our request to cease work."

"I have."

"You realize that you are being irrational then?"

"Your Excellency," Bruce began with a grin, "from your point of view, I am completely irrational but my behavior from the human standpoint is not only normal but you will encounter it in eighty percent of your subjects."

"That is impossible," Atis Tobe answered. "You are a civilized race. Such a thing will not be tolerated."

"You have only studied us for four days, Your Excellency," Bruce pointed out.

"True, but there are many indications of civilization. Your own device, for example."

"You have a point there," Bruce admitted, "but I have another device to show you." He reached into his pocket and took out an automatic.

Dr. Granas clenched his hands and Lois gasped. "Bruce, please!" she whispered, fervently.

"If I were to pull this bit of metal called the trigger, you would die instantly," Bruce said to the Cafis Gan.

"Assuming that is the truth, Mr. MacDonald, what does it prove?" The Cafis was annoyed.

"It proves, Your Excellency, that with us, destruction of life is a common thing."

Atis Tobe bent over and studied the revolver. "Did you make this?"

"No," Bruce answered. "Nearly every human possesses a gun and sometimes uses it. These are made in huge quantities, each one adapted to a specific purpose. This one is expressly designed for use on humans. It would work equally well on you also."

The Cafis Gan continued to stare at the gun. "What is the principle?"

"It's a simple heat engine," Bruce replied. "Chemical reaction generates a high gas pressure which forces a metal pellet through this tube. The velocity of the bit of metal or bullet will cause it to penetrate a body, rupturing its internal organs where it strikes."

Atis Tobe had apparently been practising his smile for this one was not nearly so gruesome. "Your explanation, Mr. MacDonald, is most ingenious. For a moment, I almost believed you."

BRUCE lined the gun up at point blank range and squeezed the trigger. The report was deafening in the small room. A metal insigne ripped off the shoulder of the uniform of the Cafis Gan. The Viceroy felt of the torn fabric and turned to look at the wall behind. It was almost imperceptible but Bruce detected a faint quiver in the rodent's talonlike hand.

"Almost you have convinced me," the Cafis said slowly.

"Lois," Bruce said. "Will you get that package from the butcher shop? It's in the refrigerator behind the milk."

"What?" Lois asked, confused.

"Get me our latest purchase from the butcher shop," Bruce repeated, distinctly.

Lois hurried to the kitchen and returned a moment later with a package wrapped in white paper. She extended it timidly to Bruce. He ripped it open with the muzzle of his automatic and removed a two inch thick, round steak from the wrapper. Slowly, Bruce extended the dripping steak to the Viceroy.

The rodent man recoiled a little. "A specimen, Mr. MacDonald?" he asked.

"No," Bruce replied, trying to leer. *"Food!"*

Atis Tobe winced and covered his eyes. In a moment he recovered his composure and turned to stare at Dr. Granas. "Is all this the truth?"

Granas nodded his head. "I'm afraid it is, Your Excellency."

"How horrible! How depraved!"

There was silence in the room as Bruce placed the steak back in its wrapper and handed it to Lois.

"I believe we have made a terrible mistake," the Cafis Gan said, weakly. "It is incredible that such barbarism can exist among thinking creatures!" His body twitched. He turned and walked to the door. In stupefied silence, the trio watched the two Cafis leave. The rodents paused at the car and stared at the human driver. Almost fearfully, they stepped in and drove off.

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Lois turned from the window. "What are they going to do now?" she asked, wringing her hands.

"I imagine their full time occupation from now on will be leaving the earth and trying to forget it as soon as possible," Bruce answered, smiling.

Dr. Granas shook his head. "I don't understand this at all," he said. "What's going on?"

"It's quite simple, Uncle Bob," Bruce replied. "The Cafis thought we were civilized. In fact, I don't think they've ever come across an uncivilized race before."

"What do you mean, uncivilized!" Granas bristled.

"Civilization is a pretty relative term," Bruce answered. "To us, we are civilized. To the Cafis, however, we are monsters. You see, the Cafis don't kill. Their understanding of the term 'war' is a sort of a contest, certainly not bloodshed."

"But they're a conquering race!" Granas objected. "How can they do it without bloodshed?"

"I'm not entirely sure," Bruce replied, thoughtfully. "I'm only guessing but so far, my guesses have been pretty good. My theory is that the rest of their empire is much like themselves. You yourself remarked that it was only an accident that the rodents didn't become the predominant race here on earth."

"That's true," Dr. Granas admitted.

"I think we can assume, that up until now, the Cafis have only had to deal with races similar to themselves. When they came here, they carried on their warfare just as they always have done. I bet the rest of their empire considers them pretty ruthless conquerors."

"I don't see what you're getting at!" Granas exploded.

"I got the clue last night, Uncle Bob," Bruce continued, "when Atis Tobe turned his head. I thought about it for a long time and finally decided that I was right. I guessed that they were non-carnivores and were therefore unaccustomed to violence and bloodshed. It was so unheard of to them, that they didn't for one minute expect to find a carnivorous civilization.

"Look at how they conquered the earth. Not by killing! Their weapons are of a different type. They paralyze a civilization and give you a chance to nullify the weapon and if you can't do it, they win. If you can combat their weapon, then they think up a new one and on it goes until someone's resources are exhausted."

"Well—well—how did you know they were so peaceful?" Lois stammered. "Rats here on earth are vicious—and horrible!"

BRUCE laughed. "Darling, that's what comes from jumping to conclusions. The Cafis are rodents to be sure, but as rodents go, rats are certainly not the most intelligent!"

"Well these rats are certainly intelligent!" Granas interrupted.

"Not rats, Uncle Bob," Bruce replied, grinning. "Beavers!"

"Not exactly," a loud voice boomed.

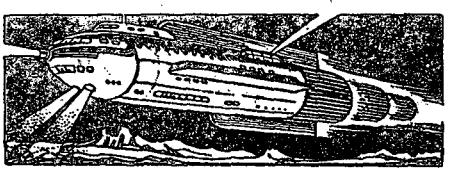
The trio stood frozen, staring at each other.

"W-h-a-t?" Granas said, weakly.

"I said, not exactly." The voice rumbled through the open door of the laboratory.

There was a momentary mad scramble as they all tried to go through the laboratory door at one time. Their eyes took in the empty room at a glance then rested on the loudspeaker of the calculator. They waited, hardly breathing.

"Rabbits!" the calculator said.



COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE

THE ISOTOPE MEN

A Hall of Fame Classic by FESTUS PRAGNELL

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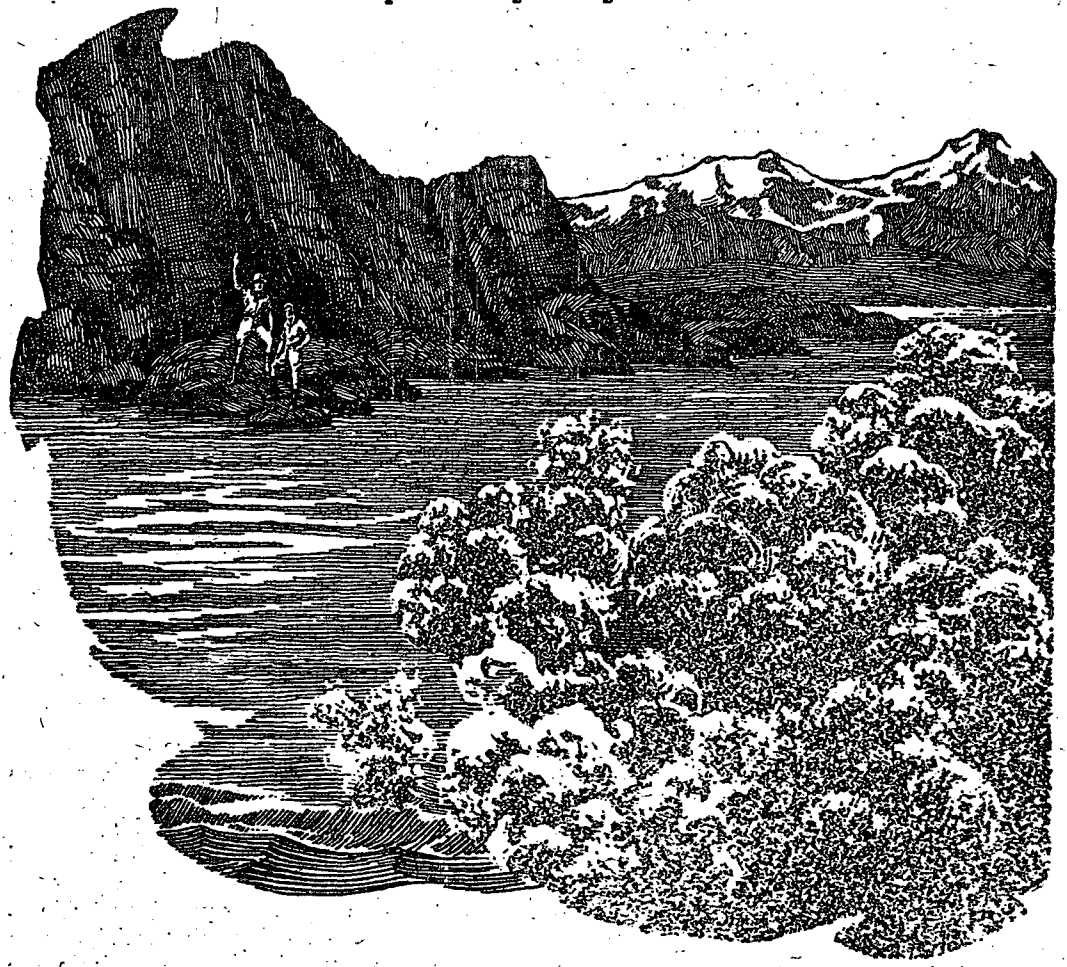
Only a quartet of Earthmen stood between the Mercurian invaders and planetary conquest! A Hall of Fame novelet



TETRAHEDRA

CHAPTER I

Jungle Crack-up

A MOON of mottled silver swam in the star-flecked sky, pouring its flood of pale light over the sea of blue-green vegetation that swelled up and up in a mighty, slow wave to break in the foaming crest of the Andes.

The shadow of my plane raced far below, dipping into the troughs, breasting the summits of that vast, unbroken sea of emerald stretching on and on beyond reach of vision. Night had caught me unawares, and it is no simple matter to lay down supplies in a little clearing, marked only by a flickering campfire, lost somewhere among the jungles of Brazil.

Or was it Brazil? Here three great states mingled in an upland of forest and mountain and grassy valley—Peru, Bolivia, Brazil.

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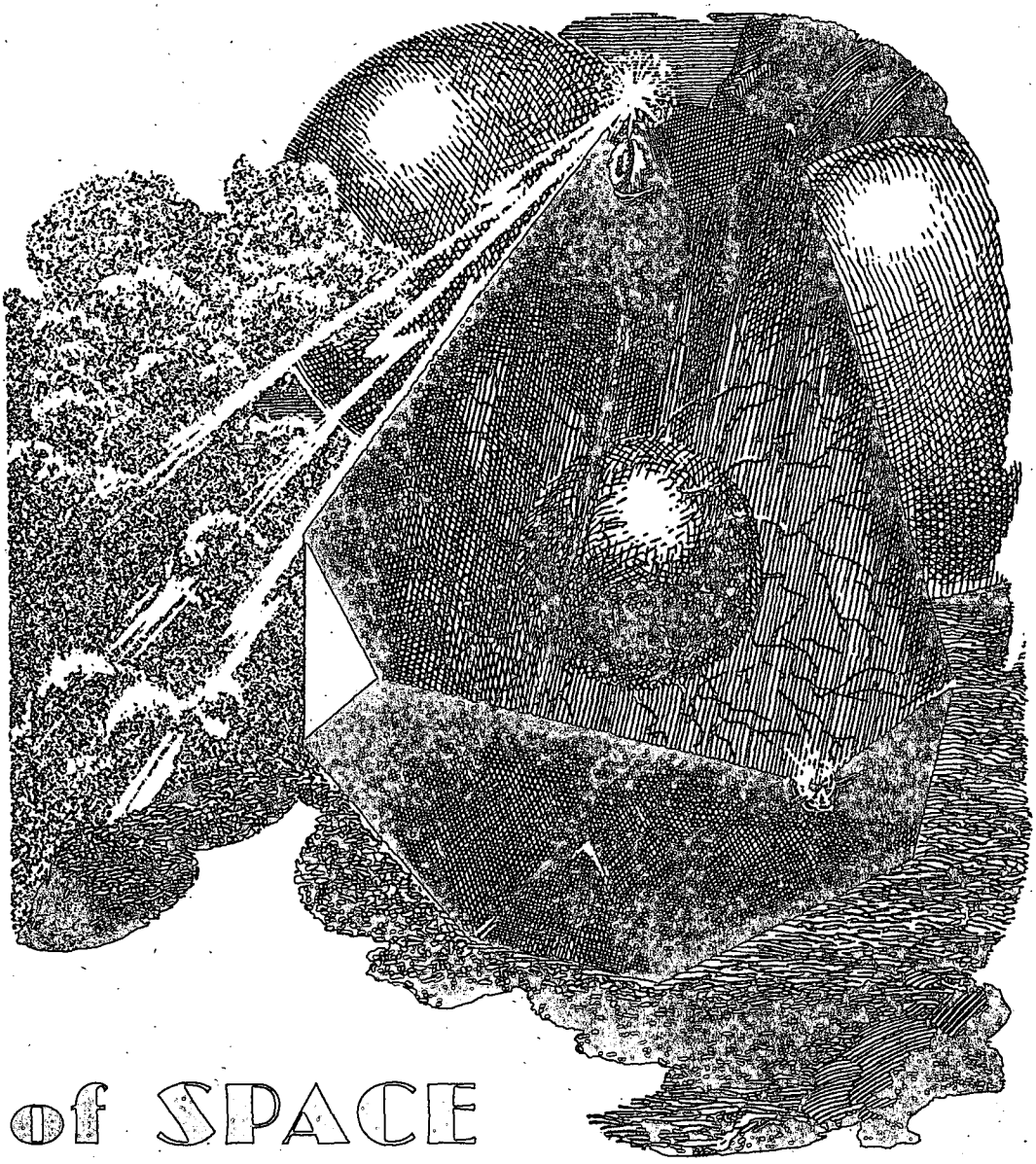

# of SPACE

By P. SCHUYLER MILLER

Here ancient races had made their home, raised their massive temples in the little valleys, wrested a fortune from the mountains, given their lives to the jungles—a people more ancient by far than those others beyond the ranges whom the Incas conquered. Here none had come before to study, yet now, somewhere in the gloom beneath me, was a little oval valley hung mid-way between crag and forest, and there would be the tents and fires of scientists, men of my own world.

But there came no glimmer of flame in the darkness, no flicker of white tents in the moonlight. Alone the outflung cross of the plane swam the unbroken sea of green, dark and boding against its wan beauty. It takes little error of judgment to miss a tiny clear-

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ing in the dark. So, as the western ranges crept out of their alignment, I swooped and soared, and was roaring back, higher now, over the silent moon-lit forests.

I had seen one gap in the jungle—a harsh, black scar seared by some great fire from the bowels of the planet, ugly and grim in the soft beauty of the night. Again it slipped beneath, and as the shadow of the plane vanished against its blackness, it seemed to me that there came a scurry of furtive motion, an instant's flicker of shadow against its deeper gloom.

I half checked the course of the plane, to wheel and search it closer, then of a sudden the air about me blazed with a dull crimson fire that burned into my body with a numbing fury of unleashed energy, the drone of the engines gasped and died and we were spinning headlong toward the silver sea beneath!

As it had come, the tingling paralysis passed and I flattened out the dive of the crippled plane, cut the ignition and dived over the side. As in a dream I felt the jerk of the parachute, saw the deserted plane, like a huge, wounded bat of the jungles, swoop again in a long flat dive that broke and pancaked into the upper reaches of the forest.

Then the heavy pendulum of my body alone beat out the dull seconds as I swung and twisted beneath the silken hemisphere of the 'chute. And then the leafy boughs, no longer silver but like hungry, clutching talons of black horror, swept up and seized me.

THE rain-forest is like a mighty roof stretched over the valleys of tropical America. Interlacing branches blot out the sun from a world of damp and rotting dark, where great mottled serpents writhe among tangled branches and greater vines strangle the life out of giants of the forest in the endless battle for light.

And there are little, venomous things of the dark ways—savage two-inch ants with fire in their bite, tiny snakelets whose particolored beauty masks grim death—creatures of the upper reaches and of the glorious world above the tree-tops.

With the sunrise, a blaze of life and flaming color breaks over the roof of the jungle—flame of orchid and of macaw, and of the great, gaudy butterflies of this upper world. Beneath, there comes but a brightening of the green gloom to a wan half-light in which dim horrors seem to lurk and creep and watch, and giant lianas twist and climb up and ever up to the living light.

The sun was an hour gone when I fell but it was not until its second coming when I managed to writhe and slip through the tangle as if I too were of the jungle, moving toward the spot where my memory placed that blasted clearing, and the light. And with the deepening of the gloom in the upper branches I came upon it, quite by accident, from above.

It was a little valley, perhaps a mile long and two thirds as wide, lying in an oval of gittering jet against the side of the mountains. Here the Andes were beginning their swift climb up from the jungles to the snows and beneath me fifty-foot cliffs of sheer black dropped to the valley floor.

I have spoken of it as blasted, seared into the living heart of the jungle. It was all of that, and more! There was a gentleness in its rocky slopes that spoke of centuries of hungry plant-life, prying and tearing at jagged ledges, crumbling giant boulders, dying and laying down a soft, rich blanket of humus over the harsh, under-rock, forming a little garden-spot of life and light in the dark heart of the forest.

Then came fire—an awful, scourging blast of fierce heat that even Man's Hell cannot equal! It blasted that little valley, seared its verdant beauty horribly, crumbling blossoms and long grasses into dead white ash, stripping the rich soil of past ages from its sleeping rocks, fusing those rocks into a harsh glittering slag. The sheer cliffs, once draped with a delicate tracery of flowered tendrils, had cloven away under the terrible heat, split off in huge slabs of the living rock that had toppled into the holocaust beneath and died with the valley.

The few thin shrubs that screened me at their summit showed blackened, blistered leaves and twigs, though here the heat had been least. As no other spot on Earth that little upland valley was terribly dead, *yet at its center something moved*!

Eagerly I peered through the gathering dusk. Full and golden, the moon was rising over the forest, throwing new shadows across the valley floor, brightening new corners, revealing new motion. It wakened a lustrous opalescence in the two great spheres that nestled like mighty twin pearls against the dark rock, to create beings of the rock and of the shadow, gliding wraithlike among the shattered boulders!

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Painfully I crept through the dense growth of the brink, nearer to those great spheres and their dreadful cargo. Now I could see them clearly, rank on rank of them in orderly file, some hundred of them, strewn in great concentric rings about the softly glowing spheres—great, glittering tetrahedra—*tetrahedra of terror*!

They were tetrahedra, and they were alive. They stirred restlessly in their great circles, uneasy in the dim light. Here and there little groups formed, and sometimes they clicked together in still other monstrous geometric shapes, yet always they moved with an uncanny stillness, darting with utter sureness among the scattered rocks.

And now from the nearer of the twin spheres came another of their kind, yet twice their size, the pearly walls opening and closing as by thought-magic for his passing! He swept forward a little, into the full light of the moon, and the rings followed him, centered about him, until the spheres lay beyond the outermost and the giant tetrahedron faced alone the hosts of his lesser fellows!

Then came their speech—of all things the most mind-wracking! I felt it deep within my brain before I sensed it externally, a dull heavy rhythm of insistent throbbing, beating at my temples and throwing up a dull red haze before my staring eyes!

You have heard those deepest notes of a great organ, when the windows tremble, even the walls, the building itself, vibrate in resonance, beat and beat and beat to its rhythm until you feel it throbbing against your skull.

SUCH was the speech of the tetrahedra, only deeper still beneath the threshold of sound—so deep that each tiny nerve of the skin sensed its monotonous pressure and shouted it to a reeling brain—so deep that it seemed like a great surf of more-than-sound thundering dismally against desolate, rocky shores!

I think now that it was a sort of chant, the concerted cry of all the scores of tetrahedra, dinning savagely, angrily at their giant leader in a dismal plaint of discontent and unease! I think they were restless, aware of unfulfilled promises and purposes, anxious to make sure their misison or to be gone.

For soon I sensed a deeper, stronger voice beating against the din, drowning it out, thundering command and reproof, shouting down the mob until its lesser drumming sank to a mutter and ceased. But the voice of the giant tetrahedron rang on, inflected now as our own voices, rising and falling in angry speech and command, pouring out burning sarcasm, perhaps, cowing them with its greater insistence!

Like all good leaders, his followers were as children to him, and the hard, harsh beat of sound swept off into a soothing, cajoling murmur of whispering ripples, yet none the less dominant and definite in its message. And it sank to a far, hinting rumble and vanished.

For a long instant they lay quiet, like graven things of the stone itself, then through the circles, like a spreading wave, rose a thrill of slow motion, quickening, livening, until all were astir! The ranks parted, the giant tetrahedron swept swiftly over the valley floor to the two great spheres, his angular hordes flowing in swift, soft motion in his wake! Again, with that speed and silent mystery of thought, the spheres gaped open and the ranks of the tetrahedra were swallowed up within!

For a long moment I lay there under the bushes at the cliff's edge, staring out over the valley, stunned by the weird unreality of the thing I had seen. Then, out of the dark behind me, came a hand, gripping my shoulder in a vise of iron! Mad with sudden terror I twisted free, struck blindly at the thing that had seized me, a thing that spoke, its words a hoarse mutter that barely penetrated the gloom!

"For God's sake, man, be still! Do you want *them* to hear?"

It was a man—a human like myself. My

SCIENTIFICTION HALL OF FAME STORY

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frozen tongue stammered reply.

"Who are you? What are those things out there? What Hell of Earth did they spring from?"

"None of Earth, you may rest sure!" came the grim answer. "But we will tell you all that later. We must get clear of this place! I am Marston of the Museum expedition—the biologist. I suppose you are the aviator—Valdez saw them burn you down last night. Follow me."

"Yes, I'm Hawkins. The plane is somewhere over there, if it didn't burn, with all your supplies in it. But tell me, first—those things, there—are they *alive*?"

"You've wondered that? I suppose anyone would. The Indians make them gods of a kind—realize they're beyond all experience and tradition. But I'm a biologist. I have had some experience in strange forms of life. They are as much alive as we—perhaps even more than we. But this is no place to moralize—come on!"

He vanished into the dark and I followed, plunging blindly after the sound of his crashing progress, away from the seared valley and the tetrahedra, to saftey of a sort in the sombre depths of the rain-forest.

They crouched beside a tiny fire of bark and twigs—two gaunt skeletons hung and swathed with soiled rags, brooding over their pitiful little flame. With the crackle of our approach they sprang at bay—two hunted things of the jungle—then relaxed as we came into the firelight.

I will always remember them as I saw them then—Hornby, the Museum archaeologist, tall, grey-haired, his haggard face seamed with deep wrinkles of sleeplessness and fear and puzzled wonderment. Valdez, his colleague of the government that had sent me, short, dark, his Portuguese blood blended with that of the squat tribes of the interior. He seemed plumper than the others, and I felt that he could and would care for himself very well if need be.

NOW, too, I saw my guide for the first time as something more than a black hulk in blackness. Marston, the biologist, looked like an old-time blacksmith, a massive man of bone and muscle, with keen grey eyes under heavy brows and the beginnings of a mighty beard.

"We're all there are, Hawkins," he rumbled. "We've got to find that plane soon if it's still whole. Did you see flames, Valdez?"

"Flames, Senor Marston? No—I saw merely the falling of the plane, like a great wounded bird seeking the shelter of the jungles, and Senor—Hawkins, is it?—with his parachute. I am not certain that I can find it, now that a day and a night have passed, but I will try."

Then Hornby's voice—dry and withered as his shrunken body—weary as his tired old eyes. "You have seen the tetrahedra, Lieutenant Hawkins? You realize that they are living, intelligent beings? You can comphehend the menace of their presence here on our Earth?"

"Yes, Professor," I answered slowly, "I have seen them and heard them. They have a great leader, twice the size of any of them, and the rest seem to be dissatisfied with the way he is running things."

"You hear that, Marston?" cried the Professor, almost savagely. "You hear—they are impatient—they will act soon, as soon as they have fed again! We must do something, Marston—we must act now—!"

"Yes, I saw them too," said Marston slowly. "They're on the brink, all right. But I don't know what we can do—four men with three rifles and a couple of machetes against a hundred of them."

"Marston," I put in eagerly, "if it's guns you want, there are two machine-guns and plenty of ammunition in the plane—it was a government ship, fresh from the uprising in the North. If we can find that, there'll be guns as well as food."

"Valdez—you hear that? Can you help him search? You are the one who saw him fall and you have been out with the Indians more than once. How about it?"

"Very well, Senor Marston, I will do what I can. But do not hope for too much—remember, there has been a day and a night and I had only a glimpse. And the guns—what can they do against those devils from the spheres? We would do better to flee, and warn the world of what has come upon it!"

"I've heard that stuff preached before, Valdez. Stow it! If it comes to announcing them to the world those things will do it for themselves faster than we could! You'll hunt with Hawkins in the morning!"

Professor Hornby had said little. Now, at Marton's words, he roused again.

"Marston," his voice came petulantly, "have you seen the Indians in the forest as I have? Have you seen them, felt them staring

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at your back, fingering their little darts in the dark? Marston, they take those tetrahedra for gods—things to worship and propitiate with sacrifice! The forest is full of them—I feel it—I can tell! Marston, *what are they doing?*"

CHAPTER II

The Coming of the Tetrahedra

MARSTON'S bluff rumble drowned out that final wail. "Sure, Prof, they're here, all right—all about us, out there in the jungle with the beasts. But they're harmless—just inquisitive, that's all. It's the things yonder that draw them. It's a legend come true, for them. They're not apt to hurt us for a while yet but it won't hurt to slip closer to the valley, where we can watch the things."

Then Valdez slipped in his acid wedge of dissent, smoothly and blandly as ever.

"You remember, of course, Senor Marston, that these poor Indios retain the superstitions of their ancient masters, and that in time of peril it was the way of the Old People to make blood sacrifice to their gods. Old customs linger long among savages, Senor!"

"We're staying and we're fighting, just as soon as you and Hawkins locate those guns, which is tomorrow. Your memory will improve with a little sleep, I think. And, Prof—I reckon Hawkins here would like to hear about those things yonder. Tell him what there is to tell."

And so, huddled there by the tiny, flickering fire, I listened as the thin, dry voice of the old Professor marched through the awful story of the coming of the tetrahedra.

They had come to the little valley in the hills, three white men and a half-dozen Indian guides from the more civilized tribes to the north. Here in its oval bowl they had made their camp among flowers and waving grasses, with the dark rampart of the jungle standing about them like the walls of a prison. And from those walls came the Indians of the forests—poor, savage creatures hag-ridden by superstition and ignorance, wracked by famine and disease.

They treasured weird legends and aborted ceremonies where understanding of other things had passed. But they bore memories of things that even the savage mind can ponder, memories of magic and ritual and the adoration of fierce and powerful gods.

As the newer magic of this younger, paler race gripped their childish minds, they told of the things that their fathers before them had learned of grandfathers through the centuries, tales not only of custom and life in those long-gone days, but of cities swallowed up in the rain-forest, cities of massive stone and untarnishing metal—"the metal of the Sun," that sleeps in long, fat serpents in the white rock of the mountains.

Then, one day—and Professor Hornby's hoarse voice sank almost to a whisper as he told of it—there came the little group of savages who were to lead the way to the buried ruins of a great city, four little brown men with blow-guns and deadly darts, waiting patiently for the great White Ones to take up their magic and follow.

Hornby had stepped to the door of his tent to call their chieftain to conference and, as he went he gazed up at the towering Andes. There, drifting like wind-tossed bubbles just above the tree-tops, floated the spheres of the tetrahedra!

Gently they sank to rest at the other end of the little valley—lay there in the thick grass like the eggs of some huge moth out of fable. The Indians had fled in terror but, as Hardy and Marston raced down the slope toward the twin globes, they sensed that furtive eyes were peering from the undergrowth, half-fearful, half-wondering, waiting with timeless patience for new magic—new masters.

The three came to the spheres as they lay there in the lush grass—Hornby, Marston, Valdez—and in each heart must have been something of the wonder that I in my turn had felt. For the spheres were unbroken by any opening, were as twin orbs hewn from mother-of-pearl. Yet there came a force from them, a tingling of excess energy that thrilled in every nerve and set their minds on edge with unwonted keenness!

IT GREW in strength, slowly, and it was Marston who first sensed its lurking hostility, who turned his gaze from the enigmatic spheres to see the long grasses about their bases wither and shrivel to soft grey ash under the blasting radiation! It was he who cried the alarm, and in sudden panic they fled a little way up the valley, to stand like startled sheep, then flee anew as the

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surge of energy poured forth in ever-quickening pulses from the opal spheres.

It swept all life before it into sudden, luxuriant growth that as suddenly dropped into blighted destruction! Beside their tents, nearly in the shadow of the brooding forest, they stood at last and watched the slow torrent sweep the life of their valley home into the sullen ash of death. And then its invisible van drifted up the slope to their feet, and again its subtle venom thrilled evilly in their veins, and they ran crazily, headlong, into the jungle!

But they could not long shun the brain-troubling enigma that had engulfed their little home. Marston, Hornby, Valdez—they struggled back and stared from the damp dark of the forest at the thing that was happening there in the sunlit oval on the mountainside.

Then it was that Marston broke the spell of fear that had been laid upon him—seized rifles, blankets, food from the deserted tents in the ebbing of the invisible waves, and fled again as the second billow of devastation poured from the silent spheres! Then, for a time, there came a lull—a peace almost of the days and hours when this little spot of light in the green dark was the home of happy, busy men—almost, yet not quite!

For there was a boding in it, an ominous sense of oppression, a tension of the very ether, a stress that spread to mind and brain and sucked hungrily at the dazed consciousness!

And they were not wrong, for of a sudden, with an awful violence that shook even the stolid Marston, the storm burst in its full fury.

In a great beating sea of horrid flame it lashed the oval valley, driving into the soil, into the very rock, waking them into an angry answer of leaping, burning crimson fires. The fires swept the thin black soil from the underlying rock and scored the naked face of the rock itself with an awful furnace of consuming fury.

And through the curtain where fire of heavens and fire of Earth met in that terrible holocaust, those three saw the curving flames of the twin spheres gape wide, saw huge angular shapes file from the darkness within—shapes never yet associated in the mind of Man with the meaning of life! They were of a purple that seemed to be of the essence of the things themselves, rather than a pigmentation of their surface; and near one apex each had two green-yellow unstaring, unseeing eyes!

Within them one glimpsed a spherical body—purple too—from which ran hundreds of curious filaments to the smooth surfaces. Tetrahedra they were—living tetrahedra of chilling terror that feared neither flame nor lightning and spread destruction on every side!

"I cannot tell you of the feeling that came to me," the weary, dried-out voice of the Professor droned despairingly on. "Here was a power absolutely at odds to all the great, painfully evolved civilization of mankind, a power that could and would crush us as a fly if we came into conflict with the motives of the tetrahedral race! Here were beings endowed by nature with powers beyond our science—alien to our ideas of evolution, well-nigh to our imagination and reason."

His voice trailed off into silence as his deadened eyes saw once more the vision of that awful day. I thought he had done, but again his voice broke the quiet.

"Perhaps we can flee, even now—hide away in some corner where they can have no motive for searching. Perhaps, for a little, we can save our lives and yet—I wonder if it is not better to die foolishly, futilely, but to die with the knowledge that we have been closer than any man to the unfathomable, to the reality that underlies all life."

FROM the dark beyond the glowing embers came Marston's quiet rumble.

"We can't do less, Prof, and we won't. In the morning we must lay our plans. They are getting restless—they may strike any minute and we must be ready and waiting. We're going to die, I guess, but we'll die as men should!"

The events of the past few hours had crowded in upon me with such staggering force and complexity that I found my mind in a whirl. I could get no clear-cut impression—no broad meaning—only a blurred, fanastic cyclorama of unearthly event and taut emotion.

With the morning all this changed—changed swiftly and utterly as event after event rushed upon us, broke like a tidal wave upon our outraged consciousness, and vanished before the tumultuous onslaught of another, greater clash of mind and matter.

We were up with the dawn. I wanted to return to the valley to get my bearings but Valdez claimed it was uselessly dangerous,

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that he could make better time from where we were. We struck into the tangle of dank underwood, Valdez leading, and within seconds of our leaving camp I was utterly lost. My companion seemed sure of his way, slipping through the maze of fine growth like a beast of the jungle.

For nearly an hour we plunged ahead, then of a sudden came a gap in the forest roof as the level of the ground fell in a narrow ravine, and I woke to angry realization of what was happening! The sun, on our right when we started, lay behind us! *We were traveling dead away from the valley, the camp and the plane!*

Angrily I sprang forward, seized Valdez by the shoulder! He spun like a striking snake, fury in his half-closed eyes, fury and crazed fear! In his hand was a gun!

"So—you have awakened at last, Senor Hawkins," he sneered. "You fool—did you for one moment think I would cast my lot with those idiots back there? You were not invited to our little party, but you came—and you will do as I say or wish you had! Am I clear?"

"You're too damn' clear!" I shouted. "So you're going to sneak off and leave your comrades to the tender mercies of those tetrahedra—you want to make sure of your precious hide! What do you think these savages will do to you when they catch you out here alone, running away from their new gods? You're a damned, yellow, mad dog!"

"You say unfortunate things, Senor Hawkins," he replied coldly, the ugly sneer still on his thin, red lips. "I think that I can dispense with your company. It might interest you to know that Valdez is the name of my father by adoption, Senor. My people are those whom you have so kindly classified as savages—my home is these very forests that you seem to find so unpleasant! And, Senor Hawkins, have I not said that I can always find your plane?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, Senor, that it has always been I who could find the plane, and I who *did* find it, not very many minutes after it crashed. You would be disappointed, Senor Hawkins, were you to see it now. The food, the guns and ammunition of which you boasted—they can never have existed save in a mind disordered by jungle fevers."

I stared up through the matted branches at the blandly shining sun. I raised both hands, fists clenched, as if to crash them down upon that evilly smiling face! But the little snub-nosed gun that bored into my belly spoke eloquent warning and of a sudden came clear thought.

"So even in this you must lie, Valdez! It is bred in the blood, I think! I do not question that you stole the food and weapons that meant life to your comrades—it is much too characteristic an act to doubt—but, *Señor* Valdez, no Indian would so steal another's food. *Was it, perhaps, your mother who was white?"*

I saw murder staring at me and in the instant when he stood frozen with his hate I leaped—swung with all my weight on the great liana that was looped over the branch above me! Even as the gun spat flame, the tautening vine caught him full at the base of the skull and toppled him forward into the black mold of the forest floor, out, and out for good!

CHAPTER III

The Tetrahedra's Power

IT WAS his life or mine, but I had not contemplated killing him. The vine was heavy and swung loose on the limb, and it whipped taut with the force of a snapping hawser, catching him squarely at the base of his maddened brain!

I turned him over, and as I lifted him his head flopped forward like that of a rag dummy! With a shudder I dropped him after searching his body for weapons and food. In his breast pocket was a rough sketch-map, showing the valley, the camp, and a small cross where the plane had fallen.

Across its penciled contours ran a fine dotted line, due north from the camp nearly to the place where the plane lay, then bearing off to the west, toward the mountains. Just beyond was a second little cross, to the south of the trail. I knew what it meant—the food and guns from the looted plane! Within five minutes I had uncovered Valdez' cache, under the cover of an out cropping ledge of quartz, and loaded one of the packs we had brought along.

How to return to camp with my news was another question entirely. I knew it was futile for me to try to follow the back trail.

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There remained the valley—straight south along the ravine—and I felt certain that once there I could regain my lost sense of direction or wait until one of the others found me. The valley—and the tetrahedra! Driven by instinct or intuition, I shouldered one of the very light machine-guns and wrapped three belts of ammunition about my waist, under my shirt.

The going was easier along the rim of the little ravine than at its bottom, where extra moisture made the tangle thicker. The trail finally swung away from the stream-bed toward the east and suddenly emerged on a sort of peninsula jutting into the valley just above the point where the twin spheres lay. Here were gathered the forest Indians, clustered behind the thin screen of vegetation, gazing in dumb adoration at the things below. So rapt were they that my approach went unnoticed, and I was able to retreat and bear to the west, creeping up to the edge of the valley midway between clearing and ravine.

Now, in the full light of day, I could see that it was as Professor Hornby had said. The tetrahedra were formed from some hard, crystalline mineral, black almost to invisibility, with a faint wash of rich purple running through it. As they moved, the sun sent up glittering flashes of brilliance from their polished flanks. For the tetrahedra were restless, were weaving aimlessly in and out among the boulders in weird arabesques.

Apart from the rest, motionless in a sort of circular clearing among the rocks, squatted the giant leader of the tetrahedra. In him the deep violet of the crystal became a rich, plum-like hue, purple flushed with warm red, and the underlying black seemed less harsh.

And now the giant leader was dinning out his mighty call in long, slow billows of beating sound that seemed to thrust me back, press me into the dark of the forest, away from the alien monsters of the valley! In response came thirty of the lesser tetrahedra, chosen seemingly at random from the scattered ranks, to range themselves at equal intervals about their master, forming a single great circle a dozen yards in diameter.

AGAIN the throbbing call shattered against the cliffs about me, and now all the hordes of the tetrahedra broke into flowing motion, converging in a torrent of glittering purple crystal upon the natural amphitheater, clustering in threes at the spots that their fellows had marked—all but ten, who glided into place before every third group, forming a giant toothed wheel with hub and rim and spokes of living, sentient crystal—*crystal with a purpose!*

I could see that the groups of three that formed the toothed rim of the giant crystal wheel were tipping inward, bringing their peaks together in a narrow focus, and more, that the ten that were the spokes, the binding members of the wheel, were of the same rich hue as their master.

As the sun soared higher, pouring its blazing rays straight down upon the sweltering world, I sensed the beginning of a vague roseate glow at the foci of the circling trios, a glow as of energy, light, focused by the tetrahedra themselves, yet not *of* themselves, but sucked from the flood of light that poured upon them from above.

The rose-glow deepened to angry vermilion, seemingly caged within the spheres defined by the tips of the tilted tetrahedra. Now the scarlet flame of the prisoned light was mounting swiftly in an awful pinnacle of outrageous color—pure fire torn from the warm rays of the sun—raw energy for the glutting of these tetrahedral demons of another world!

Slowly the great ring contracted, slowly the tetrahedra tipped toward their common center, bearing at their foci the globes of angry flame. Then they loosed the cradled energy of the spheres in one mighty blaze of blinding crimson that swept out in a single huge sheet of flame, blanketing all the giant wheel with its glory, then rushing into the blazing vortex of its center. Here, all the freed energy of the flame was flowing into the body of the mighty ruler of the tetrahedra.

And now, as in recoil, there spouted from his towering peak a fine, thin fountain of pale blue fire, soundless, like the blaze of man-made lightning between two mightily energized electrodes—the blue of electric fire—the seepage of the giant's feast! Like slaves snatching at the crumbs from their master's board, the ten lesser tetrahedra crowded close.

As their fierce hunger voiced itself in awful, yearning force, the fountain of blue flame split into ten thin tongues, barely visible against the black rock, that bent down into the pinnacles of the ten and poured through them into the crowding rim of the giant wheel.

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As I watched, each tetrahedron began to swell, visibly, creeping in horrid slow growth to a magnitude very little less than that of their giant leader. And as they mounted in size, the torrent of blue fire paled and died, leaving them glutted and expectant of the final stage!

It came with startling suddenness! In an instant each of the hundred clustering monsters budded, burst, shattered into four of half its size that cleaved from each corner of the parent tetrahedron. Only the giant ruler lay unchanged beneath the downward slanting rays of the sun. The hundred had become four hundred! The tetrahedra had spawned!

Drinking in the light of the noonday sun, sucking up its energy to give them substance, these tetrahedral beings from an alien world held it in their power to smother out the slightest opposition by sheer force of ever-mounting numbers! Man was doomed!

On the jutting point to my left I sensed new activity. The Indians were chanting in weird low tones, to the rhythm of a deep-throated drum. It was some monotonous hymn or supplication to their ancient gods—gods now personified in the things below. Through the screen of shrubbery between us, I glimpsed their chieftain, taller by a head than the rest, his arms upraised, leading the exhortation. Their voices rose, broke in an angry clamor as a dozen of their kind burst from the forest dragging the bound form of a white man—*of Marston!*

Separated from them by a hundred feet of space and a double screen of matted vines, I dared not fire for fear of slaying friend with foe! Headlong I dived into the tangle, shoving the machine-gun ahead of me! Had they not been utterly engrossed in their savage ritual, the Indians must surely have heard my blundering approach. By chance or fortune the tangle was less matted than elsewhere and I burst into the cleared space barely in the nick of time.

MARSTON'S huge, straining frame was bent back over a rounded slab of polished rock in the center of the clearing, the dwarfed forest-men fairly swarming over him to hold him in place! Arms raised in supplication, their chieftain stood over him, his features distorted by fear of his gods and frenzy of sacrifice! In his clenched fist he grasped a glittering knife of steel, a knife that half an hour ago I had seen buried in the black soil of the forest floor—*Valdez' knife!*

With a cackle of savage laughter my gun woke the echoes, sweeping leaden death across the clearing, mowing its swath of lives in sacrifice more terrible than any savage mind could plan! I raked their bewildered ranks with the laughing death, then the belt of cartridges was gone and, as I fumbled for a second, the few cowering survivors fled screaming into the sheltering jungle!

Stumbling over the torn and bleeding windrows of slain humanity, I raced across the bloody clearing to where he lay. And, as I reached the rude altar, Marston heaved his blood-soaked frame free of the bodies that covered it, sat up and growled.

"Are you quite sure you've killed enough for the day? Or didn't you know it was loaded?"

"Marston, man!" I shouted frantically, "Are you all right? Did I hit you?"

"Oh, not at all. I'm quite all right. You're a rotten shot if I do say it—bring in a blasted flail and then you can't hit me! Though I'll not say you didn't try hard enough."

As a matter of fact I had nicked a chunk out of his arm—a nice, clean hit—and the blood on him was not all Indian. Still, his sarcastic joshing served its purpose and brought me out of my near-hysteria. Not until we were well clear of the shambles around the altar did he speak of Valdez.

"What happened?" he asked. "Did Valdez bolt?"

"He tried to," I replied glumly. "He had the stuff from the plane cached on the trail out, and—well, we had it out. I broke his neck—killed him."

"I'm not blaming you for it. I saw it coming, and I reckon it was you or he. But it's stirred up merry hell among the Indians. Did you know he was a breed? He claimed to be pure Indian, son of a jungle chieftain and a princess of some remnants of the Old People, but he was a breed and crossed the wrong way!

"I told you I was suspicious of Valdez. I tried to follow you and they jumped me. south of here, near the ravine. It must have been shortly after they found Valdez, for they were all crazy mad. I think the Doc is safe, though. Do you realize that this spawning means that they're ready to go ahead and burn their way right through everything—make this whole planet a safer and better place for tetrahedra?

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"Doc has figured they're from Mercury—overcrowded, probably, by this wholesale system of reproduction in job-lots, and hunting for new stamping grounds. I don't know what our chances are of bucking them—about a quarter of what they were an hour ago—but they're mighty slim, armed as we are. You've got the other machine-gun?"

"It's at the cache, with most of the food, if the Indians didn't find it when they found Valdez. I have a map here that he was using."

"Good. Let's have it. You keep an eye on the Professor tomorrow, now that the Indians are out for blood and I'll get the stuff back to camp. Come on—let's hunt him up now, while they're still scared."

"Wait, Marston," I replied. "You get the stuff now. I have a hunch we'll need it, and that soon. I can find Professor Hornby well enough, and I don't think the Indians will want any more for some time to come."

"Right you are!" he exclaimed. "So long then."

CHAPTER IV

At Bay!

I HAD no trouble in finding the Professor. In truth, he found me. He was all but boiling over with excitement, for he had seen something we had not.

"Hawkins," he exclaimed, "did you see them spawn? It is remarkable—absolutely unequalled! I saw two that divided and redivided into three-inch tetrahedra—over a thousand of them! Hawkins, they can overrun our little planet in a few days, once they start! We're done for!"

"I guess you're right, Professor," I replied. "But tell me—have you seen anything of the Indians?"

"The Indians? Yes—they seem to have lost their reverence for the tetrahedra. These tribes do not paint much but those I have seen were decorated for battle. They may resist now if the tetrahedra try to start something."

"Marston will be glad to hear that! Right now, I think we had better strike for the high ground across the ravine, where their flame is less likely to reach us. I'll leave you there and then look for Marston and the guns. We're going to need them before long."

We found an ideal fortress, high on the west side of the ravine, where a little spur ran down from the highlands to the valley of the tetrahedra. Indeed, it had been used as a lookout by the ancient inhabitants of the region ages ago. Enough of the ancient walls remained to provide a decent bulwark against attack and I left Professor Hornby with the gun to hold the fort until I could find Marston.

I had little difficulty in locating him and between us we transferred the supplies from cache to lookout while the Professor kept a perfunctory guard over them. He was more interested in digging around in the ancient floor for potsherds and tools of the former inhabitants.

It was two days before the hostilities began. Meanwhile we had found the wreck of the plane, nearly intact but quite useless in this dense jungle. We drained the tanks of what gasoline they contained, storing in it great glazed jars of painted earthenware that Professor Hornby had found intact in a niche below our present floor-level. His idea was to fight fire with fire.

Marston and I cleared out the brush as best we could, and cut deep slots in the larger trees on the downhill side, piling the quickly drying underbrush at the far side of our little swath, saturating it with gasoline, then digging in to one of the Professor's excavations while the fireworks went off. We more or less leveled the thick forest for about two hundred feet on all sides before the fire petered out.

The next morning, there was renewed activity. The tetrahedra cleared out a sizable ring of forest before sun-set. The next noon they had another sunfeast and the blackened valley was fairly teeming with their angular forms, large and small.

In vast waves of horrid destruction, with rays of angry yellow flame darting from apexes, their flaming floods of energy swept over the jungle and not even its damp dark could resist. Mighty forest-giants toppled headlong, by the cleaving yellow flame, to melt into powdery ash before they touched the ground.

By evening, our spur of rock was a lone peninsula, an oasis in a desert of harsh black.

Aside from the vegetation which they were so methodically blasting, the Mercutian

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tetrahedra—for such Professor Hornby swore they were and such we later found them to be—had not yet come into real contact with the life of our planet, much less its master, Man. Now all that was changed. It began with the Indians. It ended with us.

NOW that we were shut off from the jungle, we no longer sensed the unease and stealthy activity of the forest people. Their gods had betrayed them—their sacrifice had been interrupted and their chief men slaughtered unmercifully by the slayers of their half-white brother. Their whole life and legend had gone wrong. The tetrahedra were to blame and the tetrahedra must pay!

The invaders did not start their daily program of devastation until the sun was high. Of late, the people of the forest had become creatures of the night, and so it was that Marston roused us about midnight to watch the fun, as he put it.

The spheres were too small to hold all the tetrahedral hosts, now, and they lay crowded in great confocal ovals about them, sleeping, if such things can be said to sleep. The first indication of the attack was a tiny fire of leaves and twigs on the rocks above the ravine.

Then came a low, wailing chant, rising swiftly in vehemence and bitter hatred—a curse designed to blast the unearthly invaders where they lay. It suddenly broke in a shrill, senile yammer of sheer madness! The strain was more than some old priest could stand.

As in answer, other greater fires sprang up all along the walls of the valley, and by their light we could see the Indians closing in from the edge of the forest—thousands of them, drawn to worship over untold leagues of jungle paths, racing into battle with all the mad fanaticism of an outraged religion!

It was like a tidal wave of screeching humanity, pouring down over the black rock to break over the sleeping tetrahedra! Like a great city of black, tetrahedral tents the Mercutians lay, dim-lit by the falling moon.

It was I who first noticed the faint, rosy glow that hung over the silent ranks—a glow like that which had brought down my plane. I whispered to Marston, and he told me that it had not been there before—that the tetrahedra must be awake.

He was right. The red glow was spreading swiftly, out over the valley floor, and there must have been another, invisible emanation that preceded it, for all round the valley, the first ranks of the savages were meeting this slowly advancing wall of unseen death—meeting it, and falling before it!

In long windrows they lay, body after body piling up before the momentum of the unleashed rush of the red-skinned hordes! Stones, arrows, spears flew through the thickening red mist to clatter harmlessly as it seemed, for only here and there among them showed a little spurt of pale blue flame as one of the smaller things was crushed by a hurtling stone! They were hard, but their skins of crystal were thin and *they were not invulnerable!*

The Indians sensed this, too, for they deserted spears and darts in favor of a hail of stones, large and small, that clattered among the tetrahedra in a veritable downpour, dealing really telling destruction among those who had not attained a fair size.

The savages were yelling in triumph, now, thrilled with success and their blind onslaught was checked, but still the invisible barrier crept on, dealing death all along their evilly grimacing front, and still the rose-red haze followed after. The yelling circle was thinning fast, yet they had not realized the futility of their attack when suddenly the tetrahedra deserted quiet defense for active combat!

Five Indians on the upslope had shoved over the cliff a huge rounded boulder that bounded like a live thing among the rocks and crashed full into the side of a great eight-foot tetrahedron, splintering its flinty flank and freeing the pent-up energy in a blinding torrent of blue flame. The mad attack had become a thing of real menace to the tetrahedra, and they sprang into swift retribution. From their apexes flashed the flaming yellow streaks of destruction.

Now at last the Indians broke and fled before the advancing hordes, but flight came too late, for the tetrahedra were aroused and they gave no quarter! The doomed Indians seemed to float in a yellow sea and what the sea touched was gone in an instant! Before that awful barrage nothing living could stand!

Of a sudden the tragedy was borne forcibly to our own quarter, as a handful of Indians sought the refuge of our rocky spur! They were men like ourselves, men in awful danger of their lives, and Marston and Hornby sprang to the parapet, shouting at them in their native tongue.

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But the frightened savage knows no friend, and their reply was a volley of long arrows that toppled the Professor into my arms and sent Marston cursing for the guns! Lips set grimly, he sprayed the rocky slope with leaden death, mowing down the savages as I had done in the place of sacrifice!

Like locusts they came on from every side, eyes red with blood-lust, teeth bared in hate. It was the debris of our back-fire, piled in a matted belt around the spur, that saved us, for here the mad charge must halt and here our guns took their toll.

EVEN so, I think our defense must have failed but for the tetrahedra. They had not been slow to recognize the changed nature of the Indians' flight and they turned that realization to their own advantage, curving around the spur to cut off a second retreat, then laying down their fiery yellow barrage upon the rear of the clamoring savage host, licking them up as a bear licks ants.

For a moment matters were at a deadlock. We paused and took stock—three men with their guns against thousands of tetrahedra, armed with lightning. Hornby had slumped back against the low wall, his eyes closed, his spare frame racked with coughs that brought back blood to his twisted lips. An arrow had pierced his lungs. Marston dropped the machine-gun, now smoking-hot, and grabbed up a rifle. I followed suit. So for perhaps two minutes the rival forces held silent, waiting.

The Mercutians took the initiative. Their yellow tongues of flame crept slowly up the hillside, scouring it clean—up, up toward our little refuge on the peak. They began to glide forward, on every side, beginning the ascent. In answer our rifles rang out, and now there was no doubt as to their vulnerability, for wherever the steel-jacketed lead hit, the thin crystal splintered and the night was lit by the glare of freed energy.

By the dim light of the red mist I could see the giant leader of the Mercutians, standing at the summit of the cliff above the valley, commanding the attack. I raised my rifle, fired—not at the advancing front but farther back, into the body of the horde, slowly driving my fire back toward the giant commander, hemming him in with death, threatening—but not striking! I cannot tell why we did not destroy him, for Marston had followed suit. Somehow we felt that it was wiser to spare him and our intuition was good. For a moment he hesitated, then thundered his drumming command and the ranks of the tetrahedra drew slowly back.

We remained virtual prisoners for eight days. On the third, Professor Hornby died—a blessing, for he suffered greatly. He was the only one who really understood the tetrahedra and we shall never know how he deduced that they were from Mercury, a fact which Marston later proved. The archaeological data collected by the expedition are lost too, since both he and Valdez are dead and we could bring out no specimens. The tetrahedra left us alone. Meanwhile they continued their barrage of the jungle.

Through the binoculars we watched them slowly advance and noted their surprise as they burned the covering jungle from the great ruined city which the expedition had sought. It was their first real experience with the works of Man, and it caused a great commotion among them.

Later in the same day they found the wreck of the plane, and this time consternation indeed reigned. Here was a machine of some sort, evidently the product of the civilization that they feared. Moreover, it was recent where the city was ancient.

The little valley was still the center of their activity, and every day we watched their spawning as the sun rode high. There was always a double ring of the tetrahedra about us now, and their crimson sea of energy beat high about our prison. The giant who led them came often to observe us, to sit and stare with invisible eyes at our fortress and ourselves. Their drumming speech had grown familiar, and I felt it would not be hard to understand, given the key.

Marston seemed fascinated with the things and their ways. There was a spring just above the limit of the red haze, where we got our water, and he would sit there by the hour, watching and listening.

Ever since Marston had first mentioned Professor Hornby's theory that the things were Mercutians, I had been trying to find some way of verifying it. Now that we were on semi-intimate terms with the tetrahedra, I wondered if I might not get them, somehow, to supply this evidence.

There was soft rock in the structure of the watch-tower and, as Valdez had rescued my tool kit from the plane, I had a hammer and chisel. With these, and a faulty memory, I set out to make a rough scale diagram of the inner planets, leaning a bit on the Profes-

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sor's theory. I cut circular grooves for the orbits of the four minor planets—Mercury, Venus, Earth, Mars—and dug a central pit.

In this I set a large nugget of gold, found in the ruins of the fortress, for the Sun, and in the grooves a tiny black pebble for Mercury, a large white one for Venus, and a jade bead from the ruins for Earth. Earth had a very small white moon, in its own spiral orbit. Mars was a chunk of iron with two grains of sand for moons.

CHAPTER V

Face to Face

SO THINGS stood when the tropical storm broke over us. A cloud-burst, it would be called in the United States. The heavens opened in the night, and water fell in torrents, streaming from every angle of the rock, standing in pools wherever a hollow offered itself, drenching us and the world through and through. Day came, but there was no sun for the tetrahedra to feed on. Nor were they thinking of feeding, for very definite peril threatened them. *To the tetrahedra, water was death!*

Their fires had flaked huge slabs of rock from the walls of the ravine. And now that the mountain slopes, shorn of soil and vegetation, were pouring water into its bed, the stream found its course dammed—rose against it, poured over it, but not until the valley had become a lake, a lake where only the two pearly spheres floated against the rocky wall, the thousands of tetrahedra gone forever—*dissolved!*

Water was death to them—dissolution. Only in the shelter of the spheres was there safety and they were long since crowded. Hordes of the tetrahedral monsters perished miserably in the night. A hundred had come in the twin spheres. A hundred thousand had been born. A bare hundred remained. Our way of escape was clear!

Our "local shower" lasted for three days. Then came the sun, and the mountains began to drain. Only the new-born lake remained to remind us of the rains, a lake stained deep violet with the dissolving bodies of the crystal tetrahedra. Those in the two spheres waited for a day, then came forth to survey the ruins of their campaign—the giant leader and a scant hundred subordinates.

The tetrahedra resumed their guard about the base of our crag, although the crimson barrage did not beat so high nor so vividly. Their master squatted outside the ring, brooding, watching us—perhaps pondering our connection with the tempest that had wrecked his hopes. And now Marston took under his arm the great Indian drum that I had brought away from the place of sacrifice and stalked down the slope to confront the tetrahedra.

I can see them yet, giant leaders of two utterly different races, born on two planets sixty millions of miles apart at their nearest, inherently opposite and inherently enemies, squatting there on the black rock, watching each other! A rumble of speech from the great leader and the rose-hue of the barrage deepened, climbed higher about the crag. Marston did not move.

Then he took up the great drum. He had cared for it as for a child during the long rain, sheltering it as best he could, testing its tautness. Now I learned the reason.

Slowly, softly, using the heel of his palm and his fingers in quick succession, he began to drum. Faster, ever faster the great drum of sacrifice boomed forth its message, until the beats melted into a low, continuous thunder of bottomless sound, mounting in volume to a steady, rolling roar, rising and swelling in delicate inflection. His wrist must have been wonderfully strong and flexible to so control the sound! *Marston was speaking to the tetrahedra with the voice of his drum!*

DURING those long, empty days on the crag-side he had been listening, learning, drilling into his scientist's brain the meaning of every voiced command that the great master of the Mercutian tetrahedra thundered to his crystal hosts, learning their inflections, storing them in his mind!

He had memorized a simple vocabulary—a host of nouns and verbs that even yet seem beyond the power of any man to glean from the muttering of an alien race, coupled with the actions that fitted the words. But Marston *had* learned, and with the sullen voice of the giant drum he was replying, in words that the tetrahedron understood!

For the crimson mist faded, vanished. The crystal ranks split, and through the lane between them glided the giant ruler, coming to where Marston sat with his drum. He stopped, spoke in words very like those that

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Marston had used. "What—you?"

"We—tetrahedra—Earth." I translate rudely, as they spoke.

The giant was startled. How could we, misshapen, flabby monstrosities, be rulers of a planet, equal to themselves?

"You—tetrahedra?"

The drum muttered approval, as for a fulfilled command. The idea had been transferred but the purple giant did not seem to think much of it.

"You—weak! (Easily vulnerable, like vegetation, was the sense of the term used.) *We*—tetrahedra—our planet—and Earth!"

Marston called to me. "Hawkins, bring down those stones you've been chipping and a flask of water. Wait—bring two flasks, and a gun."

So he had seen me at work and guessed my plan. Well, his own beat it hollow but if he had an idea, I wasn't going to hinder him. I lugged the slabs down and went back for the stoppered canteens of water and the gun. At his directions I set one flask against the rock of the hillside. He took the other.

"You work the slabs, Hawkins," he said, "while I talk. I'll translate, and you act accordingly." The drum spoke. "Sun—Sun—Sun." He pointed. "Your Sun—our Sun."

The tetrahedron approved. He came from our own Solar System.

Now he was pointing to my diagram, to the Sun, the Earth and its orbit. "Sun. Sun. Earth. Earth." I rolled the jade bead slowly along its groove, the white moon-pebble following in its spiral course. I rolled the other planets, showed him their colors and relative sizes. Marston was drumming again as I touched planet after planet, questioning. "Your planet—your planet? Your planet—what? This?"

The giant disapproved. It was not Mars.

"This?" It was anything but Venus! Venus must have been pretty wet for the completest comfort.

Eagerly, "This?" Assent! The Professor was right! They came from Mercury! So far, so good. Marston took my other plaque—the relief map of Earth.

"Earth—Earth."

Yes, the Mercutian recognized it. He had seen it thus from space.

With a crystal of quartz, Marston gouged our particular section of South America, pointed to the ground, to the lake, the forests.

"This—this," he said.

More approval. They knew where they were, all right. Now he reopened a closed subject. "You—tetrahedra—Mercury." They sure were!

"We—tetrahedra—*Earth!"* Not so good! He repeated: *"You*—Mercury. *We*—Earth. We—tetrahedra!" There were evident signs of dissent! Marston swelled the reassurance-tone, then added a sharp call to attention, raised his gun, fired twice, threw the weapon down, and redoubled his assurance of well-meaning and safety.

His aim had been good. The flask was pierced at top and bottom, and a thin stream of water was jetting forth, trickling over the glassy rock toward us. It made a little pool at his feet, lipped over, and the double rank of tetrahedra drew back to let it pass. It formed another little pool, close to the base of their giant leader. He wasn't taking bluffs! A flash of blinding energy and the pool was steam and the rock white-hot! Marston learned another word.

"Water—d e a d! We—tetrahedra—Mercury—and Earth!"

Not so good! Marston tried another.

"You—tetrahedra—Mercury. *W a t e r*—tetrahedron—Earth!"

An alarming idea that! Water the lord of Earth!

"Water—*no*—dead!" Decided negation in the drum. He pointed. True enough, the steam was condensing and running down the smooth rock in little droplets. Water could not be killed! It always came back!

"We—tetrahedra—water!"

Phew! That *was* a statement! He proved it. He dabbled his fingers in the pool at his feet, took some up in his hand and slicked back his hair. I gave a thunderous grunt by way of attracting attention, uncapped the other canteen, and poured a long and very visible stream of water down my throat. Marston took the canteen and did the same, then sent me for more water, a pailful.

"Water—tetrahedron—Earth!" he reiterated. He illustrated his point, dipped water from the pail with much splashing and poured it over my relief of the Earth, filling the hollows of the seas. He had another hunch, rolled Venus around its orbit.

"Water—tetrahedron—Venus?" Oh, decidedly. The purple giant was sure of that. Marston tried Mercury.

"You—tetrahedra—Mercury. Water—*no*—tetrahedron—Mercury." A pause. Then slowly, *"Water—tetrahedron—you!"*

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AND he was right. Water had them licked. I had a bright idea and Marston moved camp to the brink of the lake, striding like a conqueror between the double file of tetrahedra. Arrived beside the water, with the giant fairly close and the army in the background, I stripped and dove in—brought up a chunk of half-dissolved purple crystal! Marston rubbed it in gleefully.

"Water—tetrahadron—*you!*" They had to admit it. Now he tried to coin a word—pointed to the sky and shuffled syllables on the drum. "Up—up. Water—up." The giant caught on and supplied the correct term. Marston coined a real one—a genial, murmurous "Thank-you"—on his drum.

Marston drummed attention and reassurance and I started demonstrating my little Solar System again, while Marston announced again that Earth was largely water—no fit place for tetrahedra—water that could be killed, but that came down again in rain. He drilled in the idea of rain, until he was sure he made his point. The etymology of the word was clear to all concerned. They knew what rain was now.

I had poked a hole through the soft, thin rock of Mercury's orbit and put clay plugs in Earth's orbit at diametrically opposite points. Now Marston demonstrated. He poured water on Mercury. It vanished.

"Mercury—no—rain. No!" The entire host had crowded in and there was a general murmur of assent.

Venus, on the other hand, being a deep groove, held plenty of water. "Venus—rain. Water—tetrahedron—Venus."

They got that too.

He moved out one planet and I could feel a tensing. They knew what he was driving at! He was going to describe weather-conditions of Earth. Half Earth's orbit held water to the brim. The other half was rather damp. He slowly moved Earth around her circles, showing that six months were wet and six not so wet. He took to the drum for emphasis.

"*Water*—tetrahedron—Earth. *We*—tetrahedron—water. Water—tetradron—*you.*" *A* delicate inference. Then slowly, emphatically, "Water—Venus. Water—Earth." And now his final card.

He set Mercury in its orbit, placed Venus almost opposite, paused. The giant assented That was where the planets were at present. He skipped Earth and went to Mars, rolled it along its orbit, stopped it. Assent. All true, so far. And now I saw his point for, when he dropped Earth in place, very nearly in line between Mars and Mercury, *it fell in the middle of the dry half of the orbit!*

A hundred tetrahedra slid back a yard or so in recoil. This rain which had drowned out practically all of their army was an example of our *dry* season! By inference, our real wet weather must have been sheer Mercutian hell to every tetrahedron of them!

But Marston was too good a diplomat to give them a hands off without suggesting an alternative. He slowly poured water on Mars. Mars apparently and actually had a hole in its bottom, for it drained bone dry. Mars, now, was very nice. But Earth was nasty and wet, as bad as Venus or worse. And it was inhabited by a race of super-intelligent fish, to judge from the impression he gave the tetrahedra. He picked up the drum for a last word.

"Earth—*rain.* Mars—*no*—rain. *We*—Earth. You—*no*—Earth. You—Mars?" He dwelt on the question. "Mars? Mars???" He rolled out an endless questionmark, then suddenly quit, took a long, flashing drink of water from the flask, and dove into the lake, clothes and all. I followed him, and together we splashed to the other shore, making our mastery of the water very evident. If things, worked out, all well and good. If they didn't well, we had the lake between us.

And it did work! For a moment they stood motionless, the mighty sixteen-foot tetrahedron of royal purple and his eight-foot purple retinue, silent, considering. Then came a sudden comand, and the hundred flowed in orderly motion to the spheres, entered. Their mighty master was alone. For an instant he hesitated, then swept forward to the very edge of the lake. From this towering peak beat the white lightnings, lashing the purple waters into great billowing clouds of steam that threw up a dense wall of mist between us! Through the hiss of the steam came his thunderous voice, in last comment upon the invasion of his tetrahedral race! Marston translated, softly.

"Water—tetrahedron—Earth. *You*—tetrahedron—water. *We—kill—water!* You—Earth. We—Mars. *Mars!*"

Up from behind the wall of "killed" water rose two great, glorious pearls, marvelously opalescent in the rays of the setting sun—up and up, smaller and smaller, until they vanished into the deepening blue above the Andes. Ironically, it began to rain.

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TARGET NO. 1

FIRST TARGET IN SPACE

By R. L. Farnsworth

SINCE the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution there has been the realization, in both the minds of scientists and of an intensely interested public, that Man would soon possess the tools to lift him from the surface of the Earth toward the myriad worlds that accompany him so faithfully through the abyss of space. While the tools to implement the great dream have seemed slow in coming, they have, in fact, developed with a seemingly single-minded cosmic purpose, since each source of power, newly found, has been greater than the last.

The first to realize the strength with which Man was girding himself was Jules Verne who, with his impractical "Moon-Cannon," was the first to use existing mechanical means to conquer the depths between Earth and Moon. Ironically enough, Verne utilized the proper method, the rocket, as an auxiliary measure to check the fall of his projectile back upon the Earth.

The Problem of Finance

Today we have it in our power to reach the surface of our satellite. The great development of the liquid fuel rocket in World War II gives us the tool. And, as a sure thing, atomic energy is now in our possession.

The only problem remaining is the one of finance. If you doubt this, recall what was said before the War in regard to atomic power. It was said that it would not be realized for easily a hundred years. Yet two billion dollars was sufficient not only to bring it to fruition, but soon enough to be used as a military weapon.

The same situation exists with the rocket. Given the funds, a rocket today could reach the Moon.

Why Reach for the Moon?

Curiously enough, now that we have it in our power to reach the Moon, there is a great hue and cry as to why we should want to do so! Well, why should we? What do we know about the Moon? What makes our nearest large neighbor in space Rocket Target Number One?

Physically, we think that we know the following facts about our target. The Moon has a diameter of 2,160 miles and revolves about the Earth once every twenty-seven days and eight hours, at a mean distance of 239,000 miles. Its total area is approximately fifteen million square miles, which, since it seems to have no bodies of water—at least on the visible side—gives it a land area equal to a little less than the combined land area of North and South America.

A Forbidding Picture

Most popular books on astronomy tell us that the Moon has neither air nor water and that the thousands upon thousands of crater

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"All Aboard for a Trip to the Moon"

formations which cover its surface are due to meteoric action upon a world without weather or subsequent erosion. Temperatures given are estimated to vary between 120°C in the daytime to 80°C during the long night.

However, this has not been definitely determined. Generally there is added a note to the effect that nothing ever happens on the Moon, and that it is a dead world. Naturally, with this forbidding picture, the public in general has been unable to become greatly enthused over the rocket-to-the-Moon. However there are other and more interesting considerations.

They All Had an Idea

Historically, our satellite, larger in proportion to Earth than any other planet's moon—the Moon is only slightly smaller than the planet Mercury—has evoked great and sustained interest through the ages.

Four thousand years ago the ancient Hindus thought of the Moon as a vessel full of sacred wine, a kind of miraculous pitcher

The president of the United States Rocket Society lists points of interest you'll want to see on a trip you may be taking sooner than you think!

R. L. FARNSWORTH

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that waned as the wine was drunk, but always filled itself again! In the name of the Moon they drank on all state occasions.

Later, according to Herodotus, the tireless Greek historian, the Persians, lords of the then lush Middle East, deliberated on weighty affairs while drinking in the name of the Moon! And reconsidered, when sober! That was not such a bad custom.

"But," continues the curious Greek, "sometimes they deliberate when sober and decide when drunk!"

Strangely enough, all through the ancient times of Man, the Moon, glorious in the clear skies of earlier cultures, was worshiped in particularly romantic fashion. Such provocative goddesses of antiquity as Diana, Artemis, Ishtar and Selene all testify to the feminine, inconsistent nature of the Moon. Inconsistent because of the impossible struggle of all earlier mathematicians to reconcile the Lunar motions with those of the Sun for calendar purposes! Also, always feminine, due to the inexplicable coincidence of the natural functions of women agreeing with the twenty-eight day phases of the Moon.

Since the very dawn of vision, Man has yearned to catch a glimpse of the unseen side of the Moon. While six-tenths of the Moon can be seen, due to irregularities in its motion, selenography—the science of Lunar map making—can never show us the other four-tenths of her shattered landscape. Forever veiled to us, from Earth a constant challenge, this unseen side of the Moon has caused uncounted minds, both popular and scientific, to speculate.

A One-Way Trip!

Today we know but one thing about the hidden face of our astral companion, and that is that it is the perfect base from which to manufacture atomic rockets with which to blast helpless humanity on Earth!

When we think of a rocket-to-the-Moon we are accustomed to think of a one-way trip, with unutterably harsh conditions upon arrival. The facts are that not one, but several rockets would be sent to the Moon at the same time, perhaps only one containing passengers. The rest, radio-controlled, would contain supplies, laboratories, and serve as additional buildings once they had landed.

To return to Earth would be a much simpler matter than is generally supposed. The present velocity of the captured German V-2 rocket, which is one and a half miles per second, is exactly the escape velocity necessary to take a rocket from the Moon to the Earth. It is not too much to suppose that the V-2 has been greatly improved upon during its tenure in the United States, nor to suggest that return rockets could be taken along, piece-meal if necessary, to provide for a return to Earth.

Living on the Moon in air-tight structures would certainly be easier of accomplishment than sustaining life in a submarine or a stratosphere plane. Both are greatly restricted, due to the necessity of movement.

Once on the Moon, the possibilities for scientific research are immense. As an astronomical observatory, as a physics, biological, and photographic laboratory, as a master weather station from which to note and relay advance weather information to Earth, for the study of cosmic radiations and the structure of the Sun and Stars. For all of these purposes the cost of exploration would be paid a million times over.

Is It a "Dead" World?

Solar energy could be utilized for power, and should the "craters" be found to be of volcanic origin, what heavy metals exist on the Moon should be well distributed upon the surface. All science on Earth is doomed to work forever beneath a layer of atmosphere, about which little is known, and through which all observations, astronomic and spectroscopic, must be taken—with what aberrations we do not know.

Now, about this "dead" world. In regard to the craters, J. E. Spurr, in his "Geology Applied to Selenology" gives a masterly exposition of the volcanic origin of the craters as opposed to the prevailing meteoric theory. Since not within the memory of historical astronomy has a meteor ever been seen to make a crater, and since there have been changes observed on the Moon, the theory of vulcanism lends credence to the thought that the Moon is not yet entirely "dead." Before 1866 the crater Linné was used as a reference point, and was a definitely dark object. Today it is light colored and of little use for a base point.

Up to April, 1871, there were over 1,600 recorded observations of fluctuations of lights in the crater Plato and thirty-seven graphs of the appearance. All such records are now on file in the Library of the Royal

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Astronomical Society.

The American astronomer, Wm. Pickering, reported moving gray spots in Eratosthenes. Lights have been observed in the following craters—Bessel, Copernicus, Aristarchus, Linné, Plato, Carlini, Eudoxus and Proclus. A bright spot was seen west of Picard on March 23 and on March 26, 1909. On Dec. 19, 1919 a black mark was observed near Littrow, and on Jan. 31, 1915, white spots were seen in Littrow. On Sept. 13, 1889, a black spot with a white border was seen in Plinius and a veritable lighthouse was observed in Aristarchus on May 7, 1867, and again on Nov. 7, 1891.

Dark triangular patches have been seen moving on the Moon and for a hundred and twenty years flashes of light have been seen on Mare Crisium. On May 13, 1870, there was an "extraordinary" display of lights on Plato and a luminous triangle was seen on the floor of Plato on Nov. 23, 1887. And on Aug. 29, 1917 a luminous object was seen moving within Plato. Incidentally, Plato is sixty miles in diameter, and has walls five thousand feet high.

How About Air?

As to atmosphere on this "dead" world. Contrary to opinion there have been many instances of stars that have been reported out of place when occulted by the Moon. Yet astronomy will tell you that the Moon has no air because stars are not refracted when the Moon passes in front of them. On Oct. 10, 1916 a reddish shadow was seen over Plato, and some of the craters have evinced a change of color in the crater floor with the coming of the Lunar day. On Feb. 28, 1885, a dull deep red color appeared in Hercules and two days later a reddish smoke or mist was seen in Cassini.

While a large telescope brings us to within five hundred miles of the Moon, objects smaller than the Capitol at Washington would not show up well, with the exception of lights. While the surface of the Moon, which we see, is better known and mapped than the Earth, the topography—mountains, plains, depressions, cliffs and clefts—all are totally unlike any on Earth.

There Is Light—There May Be Life

The section of the Moon near the Hyginus chasm shows formations so far from anything on Earth that we can not even guess what they are or what caused them. There is a great "valley," ninety miles long and six miles wide, connecting Mare Imbrium with Mare Frigoris. And there is the great "wall" near Thebit.

But there have been stranger observations than those of the textbooks. A formation shaped like a sword lies near Birt. A geometric "X" has been seen in Eratosthenes. A peculiar "sign" in Plinius. Angular lines in Gassendi. Reticulations in the dark floor of Plato. In Dec. 1915, a black wall to the ramparts of Aristillus was seen as a new formation. On May 4, 1922, three long mounds were seen in Archimedes, which have since disappeared.

If you are wondering why more observations have not been made of changes on the Moon you can be referred to a recent query raised among astronomers themselves. It was, "What has happened to selenography?"

The fact is that the Moon is seldom observed by the great observatories. Being unable to solve the problems of the Moon, comparatively close at hand, they have turned their attention to resolving the riddles of the Universe—at much greater distances.

There have been too many authenticated observations of changes taking place on the Moon to label it a dead world. Nowhere in the cosmos is there death, if by death is meant the cessation of all activity. The story of the Universe is the story of constant movement. On the Moon there is movement, there is light, there may be, of a kind—LIFE.

The Moon remains Rocket Target Number One!

Next Issue's headliners: AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT, a complete novel by Arthur C. Clarke—THE ISOTOPE MEN, a Hall of Fame Classic by Festus Pragnell—DORMANT, a story by A. E. Van Vogt—THE UNSPEAKABLE McINCH, a Magnus Ridolph story by Jack Vance—and many others!

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SHENADUN

Explorer Gowan Mitchell battles to conquer the challenge of the strange mountain—and make it reveal its secrets!

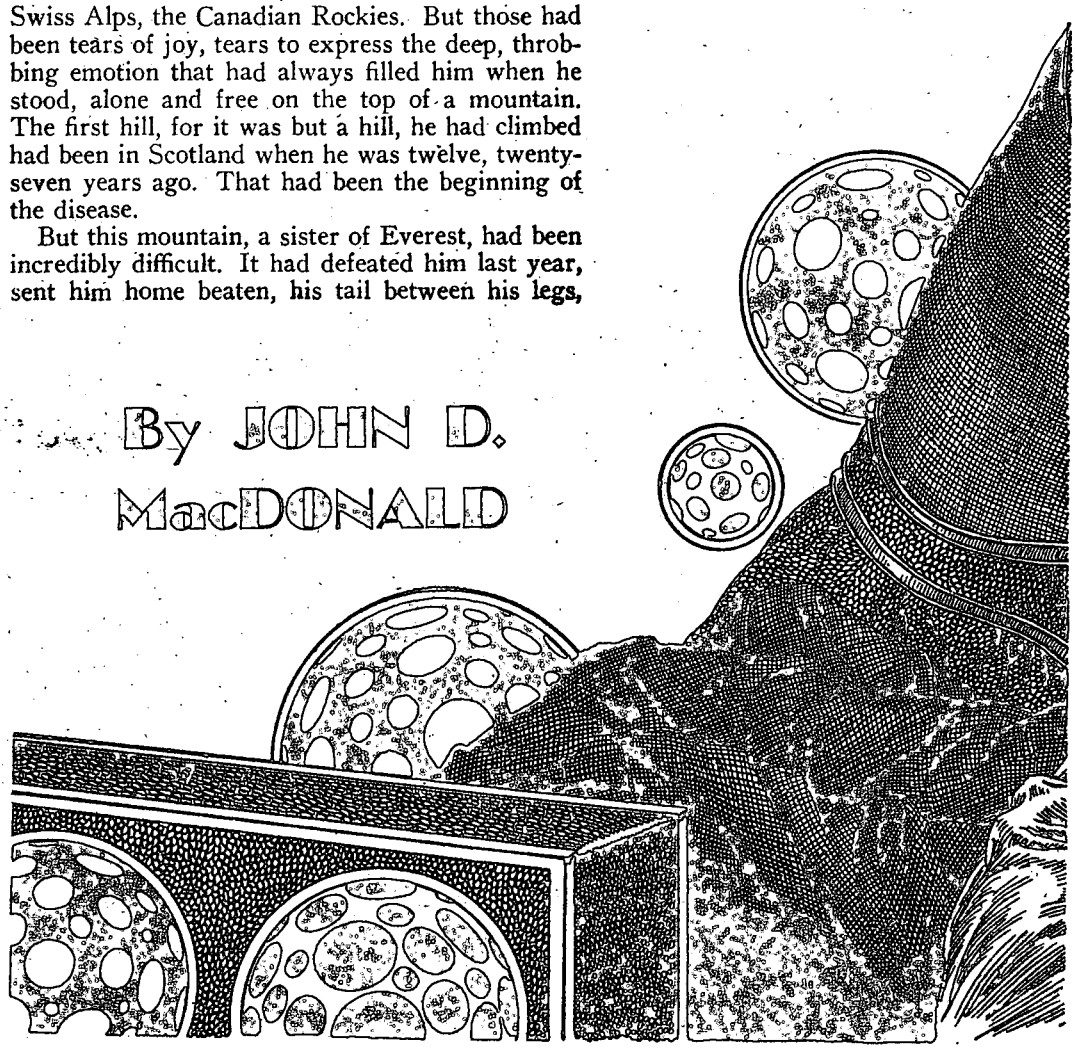
By JOHN D. MacDONALD

HE HAD hammered the piton into a crack in the unthinkably aged rock. By rights the last hundred feet of the ascent should have been gentle, easy. Here on the roof of the world, on the white shining summit of Shenadun, the bitter wind hammered at him, screamed shrill warnings in his ears. There should have been a gentle slope.

He wanted to weep. It was unthinkable that he, Gowan Mitchell, should weep in frustration—and at a stubborn mountain.

As, buffeted by the wind, he threaded the rope through the eye of the piton, he thought of other tears and other mountains. Peaks in the Swiss Alps, the Canadian Rockies. But those had been tears of joy, tears to express the deep, throbbing emotion that had always filled him when he stood, alone and free on the top of a mountain. The first hill, for it was but a hill, he had climbed had been in Scotland when he was twelve, twenty-seven years ago. That had been the beginning of the disease.

But this mountain, a sister of Everest, had been incredibly difficult. It had defeated him last year, sent him home beaten, his tail between his legs,



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"Do not be afraid," she said in a rich contralto voice

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his broken shoulder in a cast.

Shenadun! Stranger than Everest, stronger in the superstition of those who lived in the tropical valleys and watched the high bitter shoulders of the Himalayas!

Fortunate for Gowan Mitchell that he had inherited the money that made it possible for him to spend his life conquering the high places of the world.

He paused after having drawn some of the rope through the eyelet of the piton, reached a numb hand to the snap on his shoulder, unhooked the flexible tube and gave himself a careful measure of oxygen, being careful not to take too much. Too much would have made him giddy, would have made the careful handholds and footholds less secure. He inhaled just enough for life and strength, and to combat the numbing weakness of the almost incredible altitude of Shenadun.

This mountain climbing feat was costing him ten thousand pounds. It would make a small hole in the estate but not too large a hole. He would have enough left for future attempts, but there would be no future efforts on a scale such as this one. After Shenadun was conquered he would be content with less difficult peaks. After all, he thought, I am thirty-nine. The conquest of Shenadun will give me immortality among those who climb.

But he knew that he would continue to climb until at last he died. There could be nothing for him in the cities of men. His mind and his heart would always be fixed on the high places. The cities of men were drab small places, overrun with life. For him there could be only the clean cruel wind of the ceiling of the world, the aching slow progress up a chimney of rock, the clink of an ice axe, the thunder of the avalanche.

It was good luck to have found the bare rock where pitons could be planted. He thought of the man who clung, patient and brave, thirty feet below him and he smiled. He would have a witness when he reached the summit. The spearhead of the enormous effort expressed by the eight camps stretched out down the flank of the mountain, a day's hard climb apart, where even now chilled numb hands held binoculars to eager eyes and men with white rime on their ragged beards looked aloft and cursed the storm that cut off all vision.

MITCHELL'S climbing partner for the final attack was Joseph Carmon. Carmon was brave, strong, agile and selfless. Gowan Mitchell knew that he couldn't have a better partner for the last assault on the virgin peak, and it was essential to his plans that Joseph Carmon must be along. Had it been a gentle slope at the summit, Mitchell would have climbed it alone.

He looked down, saw the red, windbeaten face of Carmon. He tightened the rope through the piton, gave the arm signal to Carmon to climb up to him. He took a turn around the shank of the piton, and pulled in the slack carefully as the man below him, slow and cautious, facing the rock wall, came up like some strange bearlike animal.

That ascent would have been impossible without assistance from Joseph Carmon, the American. As it was, he would have to share the glory with Carmon, and yet he would be the first human to stand on the peak.

His thoughts snapped back to instant attention as Carmon slipped, and the rope tightened. Mitchell took another turn around the shank of the piton. There, it was firm! The wind clawed at Carmon, swinging him out away from the rock wall. Carmon swung in against the wall, hit heavily, scrabbled for a handhold.

At that moment a free end of the rope was flung up—and Joseph Carmon was gone. Completely gone, as though he had never existed. The flurry of ice below cut off Gowan Mitchell's view. He shut his eyes for a moment. The body of Carmon would fall free for a hundred feet, hit the incredibly steep ice and slide down and down, at last going over the brink that would mean a free fall to the glacier two thousand feet below.

He had a sudden feeling of sickness. Now he would be the only man to reach the summit of Shenadun.

In a matter of moments he was standing on the piton, reaching above for handholds. He found a crack in the rock, wide enough for his gloved fingers as he reached for another foothold. Getting the handhold, he carefully and cautiously raised himself higher, allowing for the blind fury of the wind. And now the rock wall was gone, and his fingers were touching the firm sheen of ice. He got the ice ax free, drove it in deeply and, clinging to the haft, pulled himself up over the brink into the full grasp of the wind. He stood at last on the summit of Shenadun!

For all he could see of the world below, he might have been standing on a small knoll

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in the middle of an endless plain.

The summit was shaped like a vast hassock, cylindrical, with a faintly rounded top. The rock wall up which he had just come was duplicated, he knew, on all sides of the gently sloping central portion of the hassock. Filled with fierce exaltation, he lowered his head against the blast and fought his way to the exact center of the round dome. It wasn't a long walk. The summit must have been two hundred yards across, and from the edge of the cliff to the center of the summit meant a rise of only ten or twelve feet. He walked on the shale ice of ages past.

He knelt and, with numb hands, took out the jointed aluminum flagstaff, fitted it together and planted it in the hole he dug with the point of his ice ax. The flag of his country whipped in the wind. At the base of the shaft he buried the little metal container that had been prepared—his name and the date, and the name of Joseph Carmon.

All around him was a white and blowing wildness. It was time to return. He must hurry down.

He stopped dead in his tracks, leaning against the wind that sought to tear him from the summit and fling him out into space.

He wondered stupidly why he hadn't thought of it before. There could be no descent without Joseph Carmon. They might send rescuers tomorrow, but by tomorrow he would be frozen, as dead and as rigid as the eternal ice.

So this was the end of it all. This was the end of the high, wild, hard life. Here against the sky that would soon turn to night. He shivered, took another measured amount of the oxygen. Not a scrap of food. No small gasoline stove. Those items had been left behind for the sake of speed during the final dash to the summit.

Out of his long experience he knew that there would be no use trying to return the way he had come. There were pitches that could only be negotiated by two men, working with perfect coordination. For a man alone they were impossible.

It was a choice of ways to die. He could fall through the thin frigid air to shatter against the shoulders of the mountain, or remain on the summit. It would be a high wild grave.

Abruptly the wind stopped. Above him the sky was a clear gray. He walked weakly to the edge and looked down. He could not see the camps, of course. He stood and waved his arms. They would see him. They would know that he had done it. Soberly he turned and walked back, slumped on the ice near the aluminum shaft. His mind was made up. It was an end to adventure. It would be an easy death, bringing a bit of fear, maybe—fear of the unknown. Then as he began to freeze, his blood would slow and he would become comfortably and deliciously warm. He would flatten his cheek against the ice and find eternal rest against the changeless sky.

Death could come with the night. There would be another two hours of fading daylight and for those two hours he would be master of the mountaintop, King of Shenadun. He smiled bitterly. The King would survey his domain. He no longer felt the need of oxygen now that the exertion of climbing was done. Yes, he would make a circuit of his kingdom and have a last look at the world.

HE LEFT the bit of rope and his other equipment by the aluminum shaft. With only his ice ax he walked toward the cliff. There was no sound in all the world now that the wind had stopped. It had cleared so that he could see other peaks. Far off to the southeast was Everest. It would have been better to die on the summit of Everest. Far better.

He turned away from it angrily. For many minutes he could not recover his calm, could not reconcile himself again to the death that awaited him. Just one more peak to climb, just one more moment to feel the sun on his bronzed face.

An odd thing caught his attention. From a deep rift in the ice of the peak, a runnel of ice, like a frozen stream of water, went over the brink. He jammed the point of his ax into the ice and leaned over the brink. Odd! It was like an enormous icicle. The rift was narrow, and only a few feet long. Odd that ice should run from it, as though warm air came up through the rift.

He dropped on his face and peered down into the blackness of the rift. Could that be a faint breath of warmth? Not real warmth, but merely air a few degrees warmer than the forty below temperature of the summit.

Trembling in excitement, he pulled off his glove and stretched his numbed hand down into the rift. It was warmer!

He had no time to reason why. There could be no logical reason. All he could think

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of was to get down closer to that warmth. He got to his feet, braced himself and began to work with the wide edge of the ice axe, using the practised strokes of a man who could cut thousands of steps in the ice in a day. With each almost leisurely swing, a lump of shining ice jumped clear of the bite of the edge. He angled his strokes so that the chips bounced out of the rift, out of the odd crack across the ice surface.

In time he felt the need to go back after the oxygen. A few breaths helped him. The exertion was making him warmer. Eventually he had hollowed out each wall so that he could lower himself down into the rift, his head below the surface of the summit. It did seem warmer. Much warmer.

Working down in the rift was much more difficult. For a time he was able to shove the ice chips into the other portion of the rift, then that became filled and he was forced to widen the part on which he stood so that the chips would not fall back to where he wished next to strike.

He began to lose track of time. He felt weak and dizzy and when he next tried the oxygen flask, it was empty. Angrily he flung it up over the side. Forcing himself to work, and yet avoiding breaking into a fatal sweat, he cut his way down through the steel-gray ice.

His strokes grew awkward as space became more constricted. The sides were beginning to be too high to throw the loose ice out. Soon he would have to stop. And he had not, as yet, found the origin of the warmer air.

He swung his ax and, in the still air, it made an odd sound. Metallic, one might say. He thought that he might be down to rock. The daylight was fading. He struck again, got down onto hands and knees and brushed the ice flakes away from a smooth surface.

Metal!

It was clear, gray-blue, flawless metal. Metal that had been machined! Across the space he had cleared was a curved line in the substance, a joining, like a portion of a circle. He pulled his glove off again and held his hand against the metal. It was barely warmer.

Oxygen starvation was making his mind giddy and foolish. He laughed aloud. It was absurd! He, Gowan Mitchell was the first to climb Shenadun! This was a mirage. No one could have been here before him, burying metal monstrosities in the ice.

He uncovered the clean crack in the metal and discovered that it was a perfect circle, but not a trap door for a man to go through. It was too large to be designed for that. He saw where the warmer air escaped. At one point the circular crack was a tiny bit wider than at any other part.

Grunting, he forced the point of his ice axe down into the crack. He tried to pry but it slipped out with a pinging noise. He could feel himself growing weaker. He tried again, and again it slipped. Night was coming fast. For the second time in a few hours, the tears of frustration filled his eyes. The third attempt caused a small grating noise and, as he pried, the round plug tilted, turning in the hole so that it was on edge, a semicircular opening on each side.

Grinning idiotically, he dropped onto his face, the ice ax in his hand and reached down into the blackness. He touched nothing. Warm air came from the opening. Warm breathable air, but not enough to keep him alive, though he spent the night on his stomach, his head in the opening.

He must enter the hole or die. That had become the choice. Before it had been a choice of two ways of dying. Maybe this was better. He wondered if he had enough strength to hang by his hands from the edge and see if his feet touched anything. But strength evaporated even as he thought of it. He reached under his mountain jacket, pulled his knife from its sheath and dropped it into the hole. It thudded against something, but he couldn't tell how far below. Sense of elapsing time goes astray with oxygen starvation.

NOT to enter the hole was to die anyway. He lowered his feet into it, sat on the edge for a moment, then turned, his stomach against the edge. His elbow slipped on an ice fragment and, with a cry of alarm, he slid, feet first, into the blackness. The back of his head hit the metal plug. He fell fifteen feet and landed on a yielding surface. He looked up barely in time to see the plug, turned by the impact, settle back into place.

He was in utter and complete darkness. The surface under his feet sloped gently. He stretched out a hand and felt a smooth metal wall at his elbow. In a moment he located the other wall. The air was warmer. Warm enough to sustain life, and there was more oxygen in it. On hands and knees, he found his knife, replaced it in its sheath.

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His mind wouldn't work properly. He thought, I am in a sort of corridor on a soft floor which slants. It seems to be about ten feet wide. I don't know where it goes. I will not die in here during the night. I am weary and I am afraid.

Suddenly he remembered that the sound of human voice will often give an idea of the size of a dark place. He shouted. His voice went off into a vast, unbelievable hollowness, echoing against untold distances of metal, fading at last into a distant brazen clang. It was then that he felt the fear. He had always thought of himself as being braver than the average. But his bravery had existed in known situations, against known odds. Now he faced the unknown, and he had in his heart the fear of a small child left alone in the dark.

He couldn't bring himself to shout again.

Suddenly he remembered the packet of matches. He lighted one. The flame burned weakly. He held it high and saw how impossible it would be for him to ever reach the circular trap. He couldn't even make out the lines of the joining. The walls shone, reflecting the match light.

It burned his fingers and he shook it out. The second match showed him that the stuff on which he stood was something like a plastic and something like fabric. It seemed to be woven. There was a gap between it and the metal wall. He inserted his fingers in the gap and felt nothing.

Wishing to hoard his matches, and realizing that it would be better to keep moving than to stand where he was, he put his hand against the metal wall and followed the sloping floor of the passageway.

The slope was definite. With each step his feet thudded heavily. It was when he had walked a thousand steps that he halted. This was an absurdity. He knew that the flat top of the mountain was but two hundred yards across, and he knew the steepness of the rock cliff. It would be impossible to go a thousand steps on this incline without going beyond the rock wall of the cliff.

The third match answered his problem. Above him, only ten feet above his head, was stuff similar to that on which he walked. He knew then that he was in an enormous spiral which, inside the mountain, went around and around, taking him constantly lower. As he walked in the blackness, he kept touching the inner wall. He knew that each complete circle must be taking him around and around some sort of enormous steel cylinder. No, not steel, something else. He wondered if the inside of the cylinder were hollow.

After a time he grew less cautious about walking forward into the darkness and quickened his steps. The softness of the stuff under his feet was deceptive. He fell once, tripping and rolling for several feet. Where his face touched the floor, the skin was rubbed off as though he had touched a file.

The longer he walked, the warmer the air grew. He guessed that it was well above zero by now. It seemed to have a very acceptable oxygen content. And the longer he walked the more impressed he grew with the pure impossibility of such a project.

He remembered how every item used in the expedition had to be carried on the heads of the bearers across countless weary miles. Yet here was an undertaking that would stagger the industrial capabilities of a large country.

He walked on, his legs beginning to shake with weariness. He had no watch with him. He lost track of the hours. For a time he counted his steps. He counted until he lost track of the numbers, not knowing whether the next number should be eight thousand or nine thousand.

Shaking with weariness he stopped and stretched out on his back, his head up the slope, too tired to think or imagine. He was asleep in seconds.

When he awoke, it was many seconds before he remembered his predicament. Lost in the bowels of a mountain, traveling down the gentle slant of a passageway that seemed to go on forever. There was no abatement in the thick blackness that surrounded him. His mouth was dry. He knew that he had slept for a long time. He had no way of telling how long.

Around and around he went, constantly downward. Idiotically downward, perpetually downward. It grew warmer. Finally he threw his hood back and it seemed hours later, he took his jacket off and carried it folded across his arm. Hour followed incredible hour. His mind reeled as he contemplated the work that had gone into the construction of such a thing.

At last, as he was growing intensely weary, he stopped. He could detect a faint light, so faint as to be almost unnoticeable. Could it be there was an end to this incredible, infernal passageway? He began to hurry, stumbling in his eagerness. Daylight loomed

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ahead, maybe some cave at the base of the mountain.

As he hurried, the light grew stronger and brighter, a white light that could be nothing but daylight. It was light enough so that he could see clearly the gradual and constant curve of the passageway, the shining metal walls. He took his hand from the wall. He could move more quickly.

BRIGHTER and brighter became the radiance. Ahead he saw something, some change in the corridor. As he came down to it he stopped. The corrider had widened out into a high ceilinged cubical room. The resilient floor material stopped. The floor was of metal. The light came from four shining discs set into the wall. They sent forth a clear white light. He touched a disc. It was cold light. Not daylight.

At the far side of the room, the downward corridor began again. He walked to it. The flexible floor covering seemed to curl back on itself around metal rollers so as to form a continuous strip. It was then that he noticed an array of levers. They were set high, parallel to the floor and on a level just above his head. He could see by the slots into which they fitted that they could move either up or down

With a feeling of awe, he reached up, grasped one and pulled it down. It moved easily. An odd symbol was embossed on the handle. The handle was too big around for him to grasp easily. Nothing happened. Nothing at all.

Better continue on down the dark corridor. He walked toward it, then stopped in amazement. The floor of the corridor was moving, moving without noise, with just the faint breeze of its passage.

He ran back to the levers and, in a few moments had figured them out. The one he had not touched controlled the escalator floor of the passage he had just left. Pulling it down caused it to run silently down and, had it been turned on, it would have brought him without effort to the square room.

The lever he first touched controlled the flooring he had been about to step onto. The further down the lever was forced, the faster it moved. At its maximum speed, it moved with a faint whistling noise, so fast that he knew he would be unable to leap onto it without injury.

He adjusted it to the fastest speed he could manage, crouched and leaped onto it and was carried away into the increasing gloom. He sat, crosslegged, grasping the haft of his ice ax, and suddenly began to laugh like a child at a street carnival.

The floor of the corridor moved almost without sound and the breeze of his passage was fresh and cool on his cheeks.

"Splendid service," he said aloud. "Thank you very much, whoever you may be."

After the laughter come the fear. Fear of being carried down into the depths of the dark earth. Fear of what he could not see. Fear of the mind of someone—something—capable of building a thing such as this.

In time the laughter and the fear were both gone, and his head nodded. The slight motion of the moving corridor made him sleepy. He fought it for a time and at last the ax slipped from his hand and he was stretched on his side, being carried into the blackness.

The cruel jar of a fall dazed him. He awakened even as he was still sliding along the polished metal floor, the ice ax under him, his eyes blinking in the white light. It was very warm. He stood up quickly. He was in a huge room, so terrifyingly huge that he knew at last that he had reached the bottom of the corridor.

Behind him, and three feet in the air, the end of the corridor floor revolved rapidly and silently around the rollers. A lever projected from a cubical box beside it. He walked over and pushed the lever. The corridor floor slowed and stopped.

He looked at the vast room. He had no way of guessing its length. On the nearest wall were huge discs of light, similar to the smaller ones he had seen. They appeared to be at least a yard across and twenty feet apart. Yet, in the remote distance of the big room, perspective made them look like a fine white continuous line.

In spite of the lights, the main effect was of shadows and dimness. He craned his neck, looking up. A ceiling was a short distance above him. Yet, after he walked a dozen steps, the ceiling was gone. He looked up into limitless blackness. He had lost all sense of direction.

The silence was what made him fearful. It was the silence of the long dead, the silence of the tomb, the dead, still, soundlessness of eternity.

He stepped forward and the ice caulks in his climbing boots clinked against the floor. He shouted once, and for long seconds the echoes answered him, diminishing and dis-

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torting his shout until at last all was silent again. He remembered nightmares he had experienced as a child. This vast room had a nightmare quality.

He looked around and decided that the huge discs must lead somewhere. Best to follow them, rather than to wander off across the shadows. The clink, clink of the caulks was the only sound in the world.

After five minutes of steady walking, he noticed a darker shadow, thin and elongated, on the floor parallel to the wall and about thirty feet away. He went out to it. It was a mammoth rail, projecting a foot above the floor level and nearly a foot wide. Beyond it, another forty or so feet away, he saw what might be another. But the room was darker further from the wall. And he was rapidly learning to fear the darkness—and the immutable silence.

The lights stretched out ahead, seemingly into infinity. Gowan Mitchell walked steadily. The world of high mountains was far behind. He still clutched the ice ax, thinking of it as a weapon.

AT LAST he heard a sound. The splashing of water. It was off in the shadows. Carefully he walked toward it, his eyes adjusting to the lesser light. He found that the distant opposite wall had moved nearer and the metal was replaced by jagged rock, damp and rough. A trickle of water fell into a dark shining pool. Thirstily he dropped on his stomach, scooped it up in his hands. It was cool and delicious. He drank deeply, went on refreshed. Hunger was the most pressing problem. Inured to hardships, he knew that he could continue long after the average city-bred man would collapse from weakness.

In the distance, the lights stopped. Abruptly. Beyond them—the darkness. He had cold fear in his heart, wondering if he was doomed to walk the enormous echoing chambers forever, dying at last close to the brink of the cold pool.

He stood by the last light, the last glowing disc set flush with the metal wall. Ahead he could barely make out a huge arched doorway, fully twenty feet high and ten feet wide. He strained his eyes, but could not see beyond it.

Tightening his grip on the haft of the ice ax, he walked through the arch. The space beyond exploded into brilliant light, so shocking and so unexpected that his ax clattered to the metal floor and he covered his eyes with the backs of his hands, staggering back, nearly falling.

When he took his hands from his eyes and looked about him, he felt that he had gone mad. He stood in a room one hundred feet long and fifty feet wide. The ceiling was forty feet high. Side by side, in two parallel rows, with a wide aisle between them, were huge, coffinlike objects. To steady his reeling brain he counted them. Exactly thirty.

Up to the level of his eyes, they were intricate with odd dials, tubes, wiring, marked with symbols similar to those on the handles of the levers in the small room halfway to the top of the mountain. Above eye-level were the rounded, transparent tops.

And inside the bulbous tops were stretched the figures of men and women. But they were men and women such as he had never seen before. The fact that each was lying down made height difficult to estimate. It seemed that they were fifteen feet tall, each of them. Tall and blonde and dead. One of the coffinlike objects was empty, the hinged transparent lid flung back.

In superstitious fear he looked out into the darkness. Was one of these enormous creatures prowling the darkness, startled out of death by his coming?

It was then that he noticed the small lens set in the side of the arch and guessed that when he had entered the room, he had cut some sort of ray which had activated the brilliant lighting.

He listened. The vast place was as soundless as before. Growing bolder, he walked close to the nearest coffin, awed by the enormous size of the occupant. Men and women, they were naked to the waist, wore wide metal belts of intricate workmanship. From small slots in each belt protruded the handles of tools which were unlike anything he had ever seen before. To the belts were fastened a sort of skirt of fine metal mesh which came almost down to the knees. The men were bearded and, men and women alike, the tawny blonde hair was worn at shoulder-length.

There was no sign of pulse or breathing. He jumped back as he saw the faint quiver of a silver needle on one of the dials. It was a hall of the dead, with all the garish brilliance of a research laboratory.

Close to his eyes was the enormous hand of the woman behind the transparent sub-

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stance. Each finger seemed almost as big around as his wrist. He turned and saw, on the far wall, to the left of the arch, a high board covered with large switches, with dials of varying sizes, with an array of different colored buttons, absurdly large.

Suddenly Gowan Mitchell laughed. It was a laugh close to the dangerous borderline of insanity. Of course! He was freezing to death on the summit of Shenadun and all this was the result of his tortured imagination. These levers and moving corridors and blonde giants! Absurd, of course. He told himself to die calmly, to force these images from his mind.

They were false. They could not exist. Giants under the earth? Nonsense! Worse. Childish nonsense! Fairy tales!

Still laughing, he ran to the huge board, began to yank levers at random, push buttons. The needles spun madly on the dials. Some of the levers and switches were out of his reach. He moved them with the point of his ice axe.

He turned from the board and looked back at the coffins. All of the lids, hinged like the thirtieth, had turned back. One of the men reached up and clutched his throat. A hoarse gasp filled the room. Gowan Mitchell cowered back in terror. The man shifted, fell heavily to the metal floor. Others began to stir. With slow and painful effort, the blonde giant got to his knees, stood up by clutching the table he had just vacated. His eyes were wild, and he came toward the panel at a slow stumbling run.

Gowan Mitchell backed toward the arch, ready to flee into the darkness, but the giant ignored him. The giant began to move the levers and switches that Gowan Mitchell had touched. The transparent hoods closed again, quickly.

One reopened and, long minutes later, the woman who occupied it sat up quietly and calmly. She stood on the metal floor, walked over and, after exchanging slow rumbling words with the man at the panel, she began to help him. The next one who stood up was a man. He also began to help. Their voices were very low, and their language was strange, reminding Gowan Mitchell of the Hawaiian tongue.

EACH one moved as though very weak. At last there were twenty-nine blonde giants in the room. They seemed indifferent to Gowan Mitchell's presence. They greeted each other and Gowan was reminded of friends meeting after a long absence.

Still he tried to tell himself that all of this was the product of his dying mind. At last he saw some of them looking at him, talking to each other. They smiled. A man started slowly toward him. He felt like a child among adults. With a gasp of fear, he turned to run into the huge outer room.

He took but one step, and then every muscle froze. He could not move. He could not change the direction of his gaze, but was forced to look out into the darkness. An enormous hand folded around his arm. It was then that he fainted. . . .

He was conscious of a low humming, a monotonous noise that was not unpleasant. He tried to turn his head, but it was rigidly fixed in one position. He tentatively moved one arm, the other. He opened his eyes.

Above him, enormous and unbelievable, was the face of one of the blonde women. He seemed to be on some sort of a table. She looked down at him and her lips curled in a smile and she said, in a rich contralto:

"Do not be afraid!"

"Where am I?" he asked.

"Our ears are accustomed to different sound cycles, Mitchell. I am speaking abnormally quickly and at a higher than usual pitch. You must speak in as deep tones as you can, and slowly. Later we will devise something to cure this difference between us. I believe you asked where you are. Wait until I free you and you can look around."

Her big hands touched something beside his head and the pressure began to lessen. Remembering her instructions, he asked, "How did you learn to speak my language?"

She smiled again. "From you, Mitchell. While you were sleeping. We know everything about you and your world. It has been very interesting. You have made much progress. We are grateful. All of us."

His head was free. He sat up with her help. He looked down and saw that his head had been fastened into an odd looking chamber, like a huge bowl with a slot to admit his neck. Coils of wire rimmed the edge. She saw the direction of his glance. "With that we learned everything from you. It has all been recorded."

"How?"

"Mitchell, you are not a man of science. We can only use the words which we found in your brain. It is useless to attempt to ex-

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plain with the few scientific words you possess."

"Have I been unconscious long?"

"Three of your days and nights. Come, we will go to Garra. He is the commander. He wishes to thank you and to explain."

The floor was a good ten feet below the level of the bench. She saw his difficulty, put her huge hands around his upper arms and lifted him easily down. Her laugh beat against his ears like thunder. "You are like one of our children."

A few of the giants were gathered in the room in which he had first found them. He gasped as he saw the enormous outer room. It was now brilliantly lighted. It was a full mile long, at the minimum.

One of these people looked older than the others. He saw Gowan Mitchell, lifted one of the small tools from his belt and spoke into it. In a few seconds more of the blonde giants entered. Gowan Mitchell felt lost among the vista of huge muscled legs. The woman saw his difficulty, picked him up and stood him on one of the tables where they had slept. The faces of these huge beings were still a good four feet above Mitchell, but he felt more comfortable. In a voice much lower and slower than the voice of the woman, the giant known as Garra said:

"Mitchell, we owe much to you. You must understand. We are of the race of Famu from the planet Jorla. In deep space three thousand years ago our spaceship drive failed, and we made an emergency landing here on Earth. By the time repairs were effected, we found that our planet was at its maximum distance from Earth and we could not risk a trip. One thousand of your years had to pass before we could attempt it. We could not communicate with Jorla to tell of our distress. Our average life span is two hundred years. Our solution was to construct this place and induce artificial sleep of a sort which does not detract from the life span. Ten of us were selected by lot to serve as attendants to the others for periods of one hundred years each. At the end of one thousand years, Jorla would be close enough to attempt a return with our crippled ship.

"All went well until, by bad fortune, the third attendant grew careless and was killed by falling rock while constructing a subsidiary corridor. We have found his bones. They have turned to dust. Thus at the end of a thousand years, Jorla was near, but we slept on. At the end of the second thousand years it was once again too distant. Three thousand years have passed. It is now close enough for us again to attempt a return. But for you, we would have slept on for many more thousands of years, perhaps forever. Even so, you nearly killed all of us with your handling of the controls. How did you find us?"

THE FAMOUS mountain climber took a deep breath before answering.

"I—I was trapped on top of the mountain. I dug down through the ice and found metal—a small round trap door. I pried it open. It shut behind me when I fell through."

"We already know that, of course, Mitchell. I wished to hear you say it."

"I do not understand the source of power. Everything is in working order."

"Here we are nearly a mile below your sea level, Mitchell. It is six of your miles to the summit of the mountain. The internal heat of the earth provides our power."

"How could you make anything as vast as this in so short a time?"

"You do not have the science to understand. In your terms, we used atomic power to melt away the solid rock, forming walls of vitrified rock at a temperature which gives it much the same specifications as a metal."

"But why are you buried in a mountain?"

"We did not wish to be disturbed, and the mountain, the hollow shaft up through the heart of the mountain, will aid our departure. When we first landed, we explored your world. They are a primitive people and superstitious. But you have advanced far while we slept."

Mitchell said: "There are legends—giants in the olden times. Blonde giants who walked the earth."

"I imagine those legends are based on our explorations. Your world is not pleasant for us. Jorla is smaller. Here we are slow, weak and awkward. We had expected to find creatures here much larger than ourselves."

"Why does the moving corridor go to the top of the mountain?"

"That is our place of observation and astronomical computation," Garra said. "We have been to the summit. Conditions are proper for a return. Our calculations are complete. We will leave in seven of your hours."

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Gowan Mitchell looked around at the grave faces. They watched him silently. Garra spoke again.

"While searching your mind, we considered how best we could reward you for the service you have done us. It is within our power to return you to your world with great riches. But we know what will happen should we do that."

The gift of life! Gowan Mitchell's pulse thudded and his mouth grew dry. He frowned at the tone of Garra's words.

"What will happen?" he asked.

"We know your mind well, Mitchell. We know what motivates you. For the rest of your life you would look at the sky at night and curse yourself for having partaken of every splendid adventure but the last one—the ultimate one—the greatest adventure any man of your race has ever had."

"What do you mean?"

"We mean that the greatest thing we can do for you is to take you with us to the shining cities of Jorla across the wilderness of deepest space."

Gowan Mitchell felt the stir of his blood, a prickle of excitement along his spine.

In a hoarse voice, with a smile on his lips, he said, "Are there mountains on Jorla?"

"Mountains that rise eighty thousand feet from the level of our seas."

After it had been carefully explained to him, he learned the purpose of the huge rails he had seen. On them, sleek and majestic in its thousand feet of shining beauty, the incredible weight of a gigantic spaceship had been rolled to a takeoff position. In anticipation of his acceptance, a special compartment had been prepared for him, equipped to counteract the enormous shock of takeoff on his body.

They had explained to him how the nose of the ship fitted into the shining tube, the tube that extended straight up through the heart of Shenadun. With the initial blast of the atomic drive, the heat would liquefy all the apparatus left behind. The enormous pressure, confined by the flanks of the mighty mountain, would project the ship up the tube like a shell out of a gun, a gun pointed toward Jorla, untold millions of miles away. The compression of air in front of the ship would blow out the plug of metal and ice at the summit.

The woman who had taken him first to Garra, carried him up the ladder to the platform and from there through the door cut into the side of the ship. She took him to his compartment, helped him fasten the straps, and closed the door after him. Six minutes to wait. Gowan Mitchell waited, his fingernails cutting into the palms of his hands, and his heart joyous. . . .

The following morning a radio announcer was speaking into a microphone. He was saying:

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the radio audience. This is Clinton Hoffman coming to you again through the courtesy of Stickifeed, the food that keeps your baby healthy. I now bring you a summary and analysis of the day's news.

"Last night there was a good deal of excitement in official circles, about the odd rocket that went up from somewhere in Asia. You remember that the common concensus of opinion was that the Russians were experimenting in Siberia with their version of the V-Two. The rocket itself was observed from Calcutta, Delhi, and the costal cities of China. This goes to show you how millions of people can be wrong.

"Half an hour ago, your correspondent was talking by transoceanic telephone with Doctor Wallace Wington, a member of the Mitchell Expedition to Mount Shenadun in the Himalayas. Both Gowan Mitchell and Joseph Carmon were lost in the last assault on the summit. The other members of the expedition are hunting for their bodies. Dr. Wington flew out to Calcutta with an eyewitness report of the so-called rocket.

"Dr. Wington told me that there was an enormous rumble from the depths of Shenadun and the earth shook. A spear of flame shot miles into the air. At the end of it some sort of a blazing ball was shot up toward the stratosphere.

"In the morning Dr. Wington examined the summit with powerful glasses and he has seen a newly created crater up there. Thus the official apprehension concerning a superpowered rocket is false. Dr. Wington explained that Shenadun, probably a long-silent volcano, built up enough pressure to erupt. The matter thrown toward the sky doubtless fell in some remote portion of the Himalayas.

"So friends, you can call it sort of a volcanic burp, hardly worth all the thousands of words that have so far been devoted to it.

"Today in the House of Representatives, a bill was introduced which makes it possible for . . . ."

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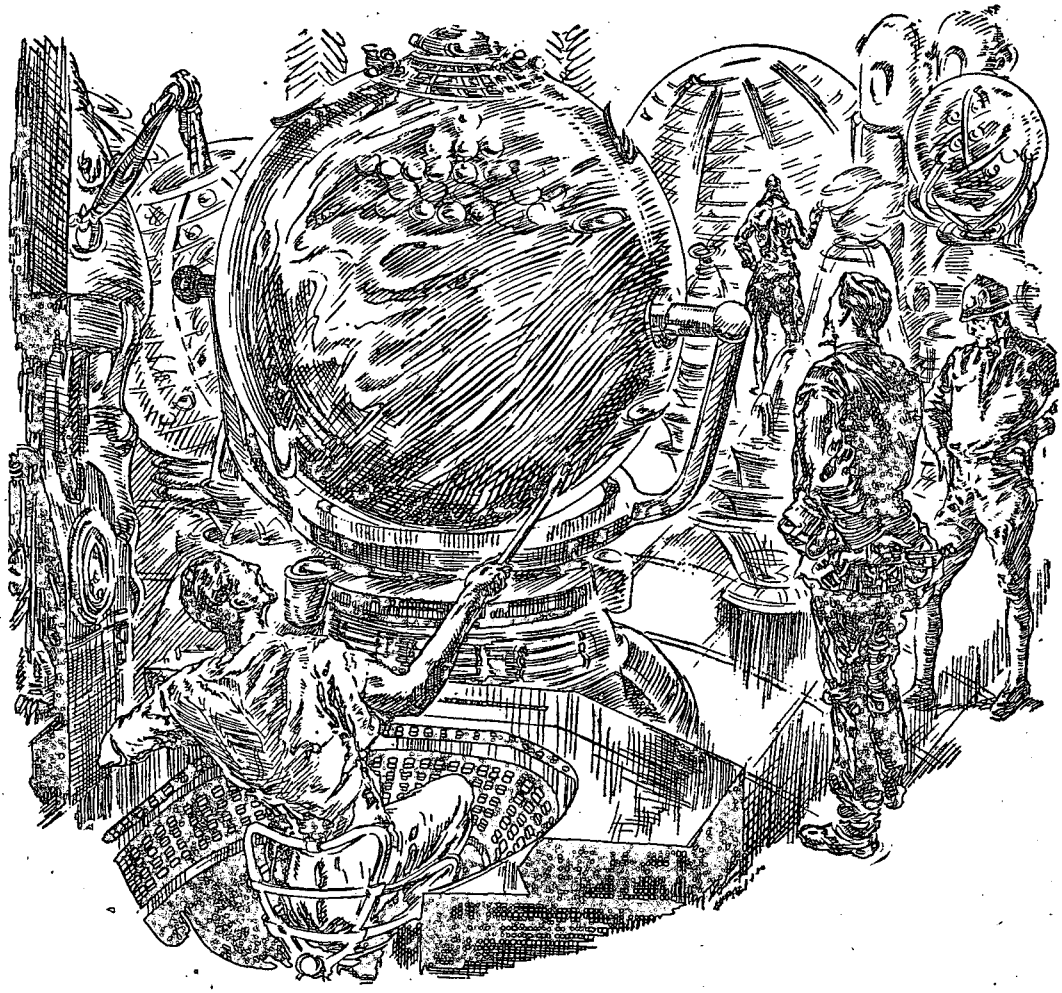

As the balls settled in their places, the operator called out the winning numbers

SANATORIS SHORT-CUT

By JACK VANCE

Mathematics is the weapon of Magnus Ridolph when he combats a pirate of space!

Gambling, in the ultimate study, stems from the passive, the submissive, the irresponsible in human nature; the gambler is one of an inferior lickspittle breed who turns himself belly-upward to the capricious deeds of Luck. Examine now the man of strength and action: he is never led by destiny. He drives on a decided course, manipulates the variables, and instead of submitting to the ordained shape of his life, creates a pattern to his own design.

—Magnus Ridolph.

MAGNUS RIDOLPH often found himself in want for money, for his expenditures were large and he had no regular income. With neither natural diligence nor any liking for routine, he was forced to cope with each ebb of his credit balance as it occurred, a fact which suited

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him perfectly. In his brain an exact logical mechanism worked side by side with a projective faculty ranging the infinities of time and space, and this natural endowment he used not only to translate fact from and into mathematics, but also to maintain his financial solvency.

In the course of the years he had devised a number of money-making techniques. The first of these was profoundly simple. Surveying the world about him, he would presently observe a lack or an imperfection. A moment's thought would suggeset an improvement, and in repairing the universe, Magnus Ridolph usually repaired his credit balance.

At other times he accepted private commissions, occasionally acting as an unofficial agent of the T.C.I., where his white hair, his trimmed white beard, his calm impersonal gaze and mild aspect were valuable assets.

He often visited one of the gambling resorts scattered here and there among the worlds of the Commonwealth, mingling unobtrusively with the crowds who came rich and left poor. His purpose was by no means to test his luck; his visits indeed were as unemotional as the calls of the tax-collector. Still it cannot be denied he found a certain saturnine satisfaction mulcting the latter-day gangsters in a fashion to which they could take no possible exception.

Fan, the Pleasure-Planet, was a world slightly outside the established edge of the Commonwealth, but not so far that the Terrestrial Corps of Intelligence lacked authority; and it was to Fan that Magnus Ridolph came after a program of research in connection with telepathy had exhausted his funds. Mylitta, chief city and space-port, occupied the tip of a fertile peninsula in the warm region of the planet, and here was the Hall of Doubtful Destiny, operated by Acco May, together with the lesser casinos, bordellos, taverns, restaurants, theaters, arcades, and hotels.

THE third day after his arrival Magnus Ridolph strolled into the Hall of Doubtful Destiny carrying a small case. Through tremendous glass doors he entered the lobby, a large quiet room with walls decorated *wau kema* style, in the typical brown and blue leaf-patterns of the aboriginal tribes. Directly ahead, through a colonnade of green jasper pillars he glimpsed the hundred-foot track where midget ponies raced. To right and left were the various other games of skill, chance and direction.

Magnus Ridolph ignored the race-track, turned into the hall where card-games were in progress—poker, planetta, black-jack, botch, rhumbo. He watched a poker game a moment, but passed on. Winning money at poker was a long-range affair, requiring patience and careful attention to statistics.

Chuck-a-luck he passed with a sardonic glance, and also the crap tables, and entered a wing where a dozen roulette wheels clicked and glittered. Red and black, mused Magnus Ridolph, red and black on green felt, traditional effects of gambling since the eighteenth century.

He turned his eyes around the room, enjoying the thousand various hues and tones. He looked up to the ceiling, ground-glass glowing in the patterns projected by a monster kaleidoscope, wonderfully intricate, ever-changing—plasma-yellow, blues, bottle-greens, ardent red; blazing orange rosettes, shimmering waves of violet-blue, dart-pointed stars, bursting and fading, merging into expanding circles, bars and bands.

In contrast, the carpet was a dull dark gray, without shadow, and across walked richly-clad men and women in gorgeous tunics, jackets of pigeon-blood, the blue-green of moderate ocean depth, black. Along the far wall ran three tiers of balconies, and here small parties ate, drank, watched the play below.

Magnus Ridolph surveyed the vast hall from end to end, speculated on the profits yielded by the multifarious tables. They must be enormous, he mused, looking down the ranks of flushed, nervous faces, alternately elated and dejected. And all funneled into the pocket of Acco May. Acco May was a man feared everywhere in the Commonwealth, a man linked in the public imagination to a thousand crimes. And yet, whatever form Acco May's raids took, he was never within reach when the accounting came, and no positive proof existed to incriminate him.

Magnus Ridolph brought himself back to the matter at hand. He carefully inspected one of the roulette wheels, timed the spin of the wheel, estimated the mass and radial throw of the ball, undertook a few mental calculations, turned away. The margin of error was such that he might as well gamble outright.

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He retraced his steps past the race-track, catching as he passed, the flash of tiny dark-brown forms, and entered the other wing. He passed more roulette tables, a device of meshing whirling disks, and paused beside a large globe full of liquid and swimming balls of various colors—a game known in the hall as Lorango.

As he watched, the balls slowed, floated jostling up to the top of the globe, where they formed a pyramid, one ball at the apex, three immediately below, then seven, and finally a layer of thirteen, all glowing like jewels in a shaft of light from beneath.

The device was operated by a young man with seal-smooth blond hair and narrow brown eyes, dressed in the green and white uniform of the hall. The balls having settled into their places, he called the winning colors.

"Silver wins; vermilion, sapphire and flame, under; gold, royal, topaz, zebra, opal, emerald and jet, third."

MAGNUS RIDOLPH stepped closer. A ball selected correctly for top place, he noted, paid 24 to one; in the second layer, eight to one; in the third layer, three to one. Even money, he thought, except for the odds in the third layer, which slightly favored the house. Then he noticed a small sign:

When white ball wins, house collects all bets, except those bets placed on white.

"Make your bets," called the blond operator. He pressed a button, the globe spun. "No more bets." The globe stopped short, the balls spun on, finally sought their places. The operator called the results.

"Indigo wins; jet, fawn, ruby, under; harlequin, diorite, aqua, ivory, amethyst, teal and olivine, third."

Chips changed hands.

"Make your bets," called the operator. Magnus Ridolph unobtrusively pulled a stop-watch from his pocket.

"No more bets." The globe spun, reached its maximum speed, halted. The balls whirled on. Magnus Ridolph looked at the stop-watch. 10.23 seconds. The balls settled into place. He checked his watch again. 32.01 seconds.

"White at top," called the operator. "House takes all bets."

Magnus Ridolph timed the globe several times more, noted the results in a small black book.

Next he turned his attention to the globe. From his case to took a camera, and filmed the entire sequence three times.

He replaced the camera, considering what other information he needed. The liquid evidently was water. From the photographs he could calculate the speed of rise of the balls and consequently their specific gravity. The photographs would likewise disclose the dimensions of the balls and the globe, and the equation of curvature of the globe.

Several quantities yet remained unknown—the coefficient of skin friction of the balls and the globe in water, their mutual elasticity, the rate of revolution of the globe, the equation of its acceleration. He must also correct for the centrifugal force of the planet's rotation, the variations caused by the motion of the sun across the sky, the change in temperature of the water due to agitation. He must also investigate the possibility of any strong or unusual electrical, gravitational or magnetic fields. He opened his case, glanced at the dials of an instrument within, moved around the globe, watching the action of the needles. He snapped the case shut, approached the attendant.

"What is the composition of the balls?" he asked.

The operator looked down at the old man under arched eyebrows. "Vitrine, sir."

"And the globe?"

"Also vitrine, sir." The operator looked away. "Place your bets, please."

It was unlikely, reflected Magnus Ridolph, that the operator would know the precise rate of revolution of the globe. He looked for power leads, then turned away, realizing that he had no means to determine the efficiency of the motor. Direct measurement would be necessary.

He strolled from the hall, entered a drug store.

"A gram of fluorescin, please," he told the clerk. "Also fifty meters of Pan-Ang film, two millimeters."

He returned to the hall with his purchases, touched a pinch of the powder to the globe, and with his camera he filmed three more cycles. Then he checked once more the period that the globe was in rotation. No change—10.23 seconds till the globe stopped, and 32.01 seconds until the balls settled into their places.

Magnus Ridolph left the Hall of Doubtful Destiny, wandered down tree-shaded Mokalemaaka Way to his hotel.

The next day his calculations, facilitated

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by a small integrating machine and differential analyzer, were complete, with a margin of error that was sufficiently narrow to please him.

He returned to the Hall of Doubtful Destiny, and now bought ten hundred-munit chips at the cashier's wicket. He turned to the left, toward the twenty-four Lorango balls dancing and bouncing, swirling and wheeling apparently at haphazard, but actually in courses ruled by laws as exact as those determining their surface area.

THOSE laws Rudolph Ridolph had reduced to concrete terms, computing the probability of the ball in each of the twenty-four positions winning on the succeeding play.

The percentage total of the four highest probabilities was 62. In other words, Magnus Ridolph, inspecting the pyramid and playing the balls he found in the four positions of highest probability had a 62 percent chance of winning 24 to one or, in the long run, of multiplying his money 26 to one at every play.

Before he bet he checked once more the period of the cycle; then, satisfied, he put a chip apiece on the colors ivory, teal, diamond and indigo to win. The globe whirled, the balls surged, plunged through the limpid flux.

"Ivory wins," called the blond operator. "Indigo, vermilion, jet, under; silver, lime, fawn, diorite, topaz, zebra and opal third."

Magnus Ridolph took possession of his winnings and the chip he had bet on ivory—a net gain of 2,100 munits. Glancing at the globe, he bet three chips apiece on ruby, white, amethyst, and olivine to win.

The globe whirled.

"White wins—all bets to the house, except those on white."

With 94 chips stacked in front of him, Magnus Ridolph bet ten chips each on jet, aqua, diorite, emerald and gold, adding the fifth most favored position which slightly increased the odds in his favor and would confuse any attempted analysis of his play.

He lost, and immediately bet ten chips apiece on fawn, jet, royal and ruby.

"Jet wins," called the operator.

Magnus Ridolph calmly stacked his chips, 254 in all. Ignoring the onlookers gathering at his shoulder, the old man bet fifty chips each on sapphire, lime, topaz, and vermilion. The globe whirled. The operator watched the results, silently grimaced, glanced at Magnus Ridolph.

"Sapphire wins."

The house paid off with thousand-munit chips. Magnus Ridolph signaled for the cashier's cart, changed his winnings for ten thousand-munit tokens. His stack now included 13 tokens and four hundred-munit chips. For a change of pace he played his four hundred-munit chips on balls of low probability and lost. Then he bet a ten thousand-munit token on each of the colors emerald, olivine, fawn and silver. The operator hesitated, set the globe in motion.

He smiled faintly. "Ruby wins."

Magnus Ridolph played ten-thousand-munit tokens on vermilion, opal, harlequin and gold.

The globe whirled, the balls wheeled, jeweled motes through the lambent fluid.

"Opal wins!"

The crowd behind sighed.

There were now an even 300,000 munits in front of Magnus Ridolph, and the operator was watching him through eyes slitted like a cat's.

Magnus Ridolph bet five tokens apiece on lime, diorite, flame and silver.

The operator shook his head. "I'm afraid I'll have to limit your bet, sir."

Magnus Ridolph eyed him coolly. "I understood that there were no limits to the play in the hall."

The blond operator licked his lips. "Well, sir, that's true in most cases, but—"

"Please call the manager."

The operator turned away from Magnus Ridolph's stare. "He's not available at the moment, sir. In fact he's not on the planet, he's been away on a business trip."

"Who is in charge then?"

The operator, glancing over Magnus Ridolph's head, caught sight of a man striding purposefully toward a door in the wall.

"There's Mr. May! He must have just returned! Mr. May!"

Acco May paused and turned his pale triangular face to the operator. May was a slender man of medium height, handsome in a tense metallic manner, though his mouth had a peculiar droop. His eyebrows rose in saturnine loops and his ears were very small, very close to his dark head.

"Yes, Jorge? What's the trouble?"

"This gentleman has been winning regularly. I'm afraid he's thrown a gimmick into the system."

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ACCO MAY turned to Magnus Ridolph, looked him up and down. The quietly-garbed elderly man with white hair and short beard seemed eminently respectable.

"Nonsense," said Acco May. "Lorango is gimmick-proof. Non-magnetic, non-everything. No limit. Let him play." But he paused, watched as Magnus Ridolph replaced his chips on lime, diorite, flame and silver, and he raised his eyebrows at the stakes, 50,000 munits per ball.

The globe whirled, the balls swung, slowed, shouldered, stopped.

"Lime wins!"

There was a pause while the house counted out the winnings, a great sigh as the tokens changed hands, 1,200,000 munits.

Acco May mounted the operator's pedestal, scrutinized the globe, narrowly eyed Magnus Ridolph.

"Make your bets," he said in a sharp voice.

Magnus Ridolph glanced at the globe, bet twenty tokens apiece on amethyst, zebra, white and fawn.

The globe whirled, the balls stopped.

"Ruby wins!"

Acco May's drooping mouth twisted into a derisive smile.

"Make your bets."

Magnus Ridolph bet ten tokens apiece on emerald, vermilion, harlequin, and aqua.

"Vermilion wins!"

Acco May bit his lip. The operator whispered in his ear.

"Call the cashier's desk," said May.

After a moment a messenger returned breathless, handed May a small black leather bag. May counted out 24 packets of Commonwealth notes.

"There you are, my friend. Quite a killing." Head slightly lowered, he turned a dark gaze on Magnus Ridolph.

Magnus Ridolph appeared to hesitate, fumbled with the chips in front of him.

"Are you going to play?"

Magnus Ridolph bet four ten-thousand-munit tokens on balls of little probability and lost. He did so again, and lost again. Acco May's shoulders relaxed slightly.

Magnus Ridolph, glancing at the globe, blandly counted out 500,000 munits each on diamond, jet, teal and zebra. Acco May leaned forward, looked, turned, inspected the globe, turned back to Magnus Ridolph, straightened, suddenly turned, pushed the button.

A hundred people watched, the balls in utter absorption. The globe slowed, stopped. The balls circled, slowed. Jet rode on top.

"Twelve million munits," said Acco May between clenched teeth. He turned to the blond operator. "Close the machine. Get McNutt, tell him to look it over." He turned slowly to Magnus Ridolph. "Will you come to my office? I haven't that much cash on hand."

Magnus Ridolph stared calmly into the set triangle-face.

"Just write me a check, if you please. I'll wait here."

Acco May turned on his heel. Ten minutes passed, and the crowd around the Lorango layout dissipated. Acco May returned. He handed a check to Magnus Ridolph.

"I'll have to ask you not to cash this for three days. My balance is two or three million short."

Magnus Ridolph nodded graciously. "Certainly, I'll be glad to oblige."

Acco May burnt him with a glance. Then bending his head closer he muttered: "What's the pitch, brother? How'd you beat that game?"

Magnus Ridolph's lips twitched. "Mathematics," he said.

"Nonsense," spat Acco May, suddenly, like a black cat.

Magnus Ridolph shrugged. "Every incident in the universe can be expressed in mathematical terms. Why do you imagine that so simple a device as your globe has escaped the contagion?"

Acco May's mouth drooped lower than ever. "I'm no mathematician, brother—I run a gambling house. After this you stick to your game, I'll stick to mine. In other words—don't come back."

MAGNUS RIDOLPH'S old lips curved thoughtfully. "Legally, you possess the right to bar me from your property."

Acco May nodded. "You're tooting right I do. Except I'm not referring to my legal rights."

"Legality is the mathematics of social conduct," said Magnus Ridolph. "It is equally as cogent as the mathematics of probability."

Acco May turned away with a scornful sneer. "Keep it ror the birds, professor. And don't forget what I told you."

Magnus Ridolph cashed in the chips he still held, 480,000 munits' worth, and left the Hall.

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At the Asia-Africa-Commonweath Bank he deposited his cash winnings, though he retained the check. Then outside in the afternoon sunlight, he turned to the right, sauntered along hibiscus-bordered Kealihanu Avenue, past the Founder's Grove to the esplanade overlooking the ocean. At a newsvendor he dialed for Commonwealth Current Progress and Sociological Events, found a seat on one of the benches and skimmed through the news to the thunder of the towering white surf.

But he arose after a moment, conscious of the fact that he had missed his lunch. Strolling down the esplanade to the Coral Garden Hotel, took the elevator to the twentieth floor and the restaurant that occupied the balcony. Here he dined overlooking the vast panorama below, white-walled, blue-and-red-roofed Mylitta, with the wooded dales behind and the blue sunny sea ahead.

Over his coffee he returned to his newssheet, and encountered an item in the Criminal Activities section.

AUTHORITIES ADMIT BAFFLEMENT
IN CALHOUN PIRACY CASE

Magnus Ridolph bent his old head, read the article. He vaguely recalled the facts of the case: the freighter *John Calhoun*, laden with 1200 tons of bonded cargo, had been waylaid in space and boarded, with death resulting to four members of the crew. The remainder had been sealed into their quarters.

When at last they freed themselves, they found the cargo hold empty, the radio smashed, the engines disabled. They finally limped to a Space Survey station and there notified the T.C.I.

Magnus Ridolph finished his coffee, sat back in his chair with a cigar. Now as he glanced to the side he met eyes which furtively shifted, at a table where three men sat quietly over thimblefuls of *sang de Dieu*.

LETTING his guileless blue gaze wander past the three, Magnus Ridolph settled more comfortably in his chair. Calmly he sat while the orange sun drifted, feather-silent, below the horizon. Dusk came quickly, and the balcony became a place of warm shadow, lighted here and there by the plangent tongues of candles.

Magnus Ridolph speculatively eyed the balcony rail. It was waist-high, smooth native hardwood. Two hundred feet below spread concrete pavement. Three men sat behind him, watching his movements. One of these wore a cloth hood under which Magnus Ridolph had glimpsed seal-smooth blond hair, long animal eyes.

Magnus Ridolph meditated. They would wait till he approached the rail; then would come a quick shove, and a fast departure. In the excitement no one would remember exactly what had occurred. Witnesses' stories would conflict on every important point. Such a murder could be done with safety.

If he departed quietly, he still must walk a hundred yards of esplanade to Kealihanu Avenue.

The head-waiter appeared, conducting a young couple to a table by the rail where they could look out into the vast dreaming twilight.

Magnus Ridolph arose. From the corner of his eye he noted the tensing of the three men. Taking his half-full cup in one hand, a glass of water in the other, he stepped forward, flicked his wrists, doused the three thugs with coffee and water. He seized an edge to the table, pulled up, turned it over on the roaring men.

QUICKLY the anguished head-waiter, was running forward, waving his arms. "What's all this? Are you insane?" He seized Magnus Ridolph by the shoulder, but not before the white-bearded old man tossed a flaming candle upon a sprawled blond figure.

"Antone—Arthur—Paul!" bellowed the head-waiter, and three waiters hurried forward. "Lay hold of this mad-man, take him to the corridor while I call the police. Great heavens, what is to be next?" He righted the table, assisted the three gangsters to their seats.

"My apologies, sirs, I assure you that things like this are infrequent at the Cafe Ventique. Permit me to order you more liqueur."

Magnus Ridolph was hustled away, and presently a brace of police officers took him into custody. The head-waiter volubly explained the offense, and demanded the severest of penalties. Magnus Ridolph leaned in unruffled dignity against the cashier's desk, watched the three men march past with set faces.

At police headquarters Magnus Ridolph called the T.C.I. station, asked for Commander Efrem.

"Magnus Ridolph!" barked the com-

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mander, peering at the bland features on his telescreen. "What are you doing in jail?"

"I have been arrested for hooliganism," said Magnus Ridolph.

"What's that?" The commander's jaw tightened. "Who's responsible? Let me talk to the lieutenant, I'll straighten him out."

An hour later Magnus Ridolph, sitting at his ease, had told his story to Commander Efrem, a small thin man with a very lean dark face, a jaw jutting forward like a plow.

"We've finally got a lead on Acco May, ourselves," said the commander. "We're trying to link him to the Calhoun piracy. There's positive identification of a photograph from several of the crew, but his alibi is good. Sanatoris Beta is three-hundred-eighty light years away. The hold-up took place exactly—let's see, twelve and a half days ago."

He then pointed out that the fastest a ship can go in free space, $c^2 \div e^3$, is 42½ light-years a day, which totaled almost nine days, with a rock-bottom minimum of two-days acceleration and two days deceleration.

"That makes it thirteen days from here to there at the absolute minimum," the commander went on. "But Acco May came in out of space today, which is a day early. If he was in on the Calhoun piracy, he couldn't have made the journey until tonight, at the very earliest."

Magnus Ridolph rubbed his white beard slowly. "A crime was committed at a distance of thirteen days," Ridolph said. "You suspect a man who arrives twelve days after the crime is committed. Four possibilities present themselves. First, you have mistaken the time of the crime."

"No, that's been definitely established."

"Second, May's ship travels faster than light-speed squared divided by *e* cubed. Very unlikely. Third, Acco May is innocent of the crime."

Commander Efrem sat suddenly straight in his chair, hands clenched on his desk. He sighed, slowly relaxed. He lighted a cigarette.

"I'm afraid that's about the size of it. Acco May is innocent of this crime. But he's done plenty of other things—the massacre of the Port Miranda natives, a dozen murders, traffic in women, narcotics, smuggling, practically every felony on the books."

"Including conspiracy to commit murder," said Magnus Ridolph. "I was to be the victim." He opened his eyes wide, touched his chest gravely. "Me!"

Commander Efrem grinned. "And now you want his hide too?"

Magnus Ridolph tapped his fingers gently on the arm of his chair. "'The wine of revenge tastes richest to the vain.' Revenge is essentially a selfish gratification for which I have little taste. However, I agree with you that the criminal career of Acco May has proceeded to an intolerable length."

Commander Efrem nodded soberly, a hint of a smile on his thin mouth. "In other words, you want his hide."

WHEN he left the police station, Magnus Ridolph resisted the temptation to visit the Lorango globe. Instead he passed under the arch into the ante-room to Acco May's office.

An exquisite red-haired girl receptionist was stroking a yellow kitten which walked back and forth on her desk with a tautly raised tail. She looked up at the old man with little interest.

"Magnus Ridolph to see Acco May," the scientist said. He scratched the kitten under the chin while the girl spoke into the microphone. She motioned him to a white panel in the dark hardwood wall. As he stepped forward it opened, revealing Acco May sitting cross-legged on a leather-upholstered couch. He looked up, nodded as Magnus Ridolph stepped forward.

"Sit down." Magnus Ridolph did so. "To what do I owe this honor?"

Magnus Ridolph looked at him without expression.

"I'm trying to prove you guilty of the *John Calhoun* piracy."

Acco May snorted, then laughed in real amusement.

"Not a chance. I've been nowhere near Sanatoris for years."

"Can you prove it? Survivors of the Calhoun identify your picture absolutely."

May shrugged. "They're wrong. I wasn't there."

"You were away from here while the piracy occurred. Where were you?"

Acco May's mouth hardened. "What's it to you?"

"At the moment I represent the Terrestrial Corps of Investigation." He reached forward, handed Acco May a card. May read it, contemptuously handed it back.

"You guys never give up on me, do you?

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Once and for all, get it through your collective noggins, I'm a poor ordinary business man, running my business here in Mylitta, I get taken by sharpshooters just like anybody else—yesterday for about twelve million munits."

Magnus Ridolph slowly fixed his gaze on the ancient Martian scarab which May wore as a ring.

"That ring you wear—I recognize it. It resembles a ring worn by my old friend, Rimmer Vogel, killed in his space yacht by a pirate."

"Picked it up at Frog Junction," said Acco May. "The froggo said he'd just dug it out of the ruins."

Magnus Ridolph nodded.

"I see. Well. A man's soul is pictured in his possessions."

Acco May languidly poured himself a glass of water from the spout at the side of his desk. "Is that all you came for? To pin the Calhoun job on me? It couldn't have been me. Sanatoris is two weeks or more away from here. I got home yesterday."

"Which proves nothing. The distance can be traveled in twelve days."

Acco May narrowed his eyes, reached for the Astrogation Almanac, opened it to the index, leafed back through the book, read, scribbled a few figures. He shook his head, grinned crookedly.

"You're out of your head, pop. If you made it in thirteen days you'd be killing yourself—unless you rode a *c*-three ulrad beam."

"No," said Magnus Ridolph. "In an ordinary space-boat."

Acco May's smile became wider. He sat up on the couch.

"Like to make a little bet? If I remember right, you hold my check for twelve million munits."

Magnus Ridolph deliberated. "Yes, I'll make you a wager—of a sort. I'll dictate, and you write."

"What?"

" 'I admit participation in the boarding and looting of the *John Calhoun*—' "

Acco May looked up sharply. "What do you think you're doing?"

" '—the murder of several crew-members, if it can be proved that a space-boat is able to make the journey from Mylitta on Fan to the Space Survey station at Sanatoris Beta in or under twelve days. I make this conditional confession of guilt in consideration of the sum of twelve million munits, receipt of which from Magnus Ridolph is hereby acknowledged.' "

ACCO MAY stared at Magnus Ridolph a long minute, suddenly turned once more to the Astrogation Almanac. His mouth twitched.

"You give me back the check if I write that confession, is that it?" he asked.

"Exactly," Ridolph said with a nod.

"Who's going to make the trip to Sanatoris?"

"I am."

"In what?"

"In a regulation T.C.I. patrol boat."

Acco May glanced once again at the Almanac. "You can't make it in twelve days."

"I'm willing to pay twelve million munits for the privilege of trying."

Acco May smiled wryly. "You can't make it."

"Then you'll write the conditional confession?"

Acco May hesitated an instant. "Yes, I'll write it."

Magnus Ridolph said, "May I use your screen? I want this done within the view of witnesses."

"Go ahead," said Acco May.

* * * * *

A large man with loose ruddy cheeks, tangled dank black hair, wearing space clothes, sat in the chair Magnus Ridolph had vacated several hours ago. Acco May paced up and down the room, kneading his fist into his palm.

"I don't trust the old goat," mused May. "He's got something up his sleeve."

"He gave you his check, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Acco May sardonically, "and he got my confession. Of course, he can't make no three-eighty-year-trip in twelve days."

"But you made the trip in twelve days," said the big man.

"No, I didn't!" cried Acco May in exasperation. "We used faked radio-vision shots and one of my men, who's the living image of me, entered port on a forged passport, a day ahead of time. Later we also bribed two space inspectors at the port of entry, to give perjured testimony supporting my allegations. Even Ridolph hasn't found

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out how it was worked. The whole thing was fool-proof."

The big man nodded. "That was clever. Doesn't Ridolph suspect your alibi is a phony?"

"Sure, he suspects—that's why he's out to get me," snarled Acco May. "But he can't prove anything. Therefore I can't risk having Ridolph return here alive. And that's where you come in. Get hold of Herb and Corvie and Steuben. Post their ships out along the course to Sanatoris. You take your ship out there too, and place yourselves so that, if one misses him, the others will be sure to get Ridolph. And don't fail! Understand?"

The large man got to his feet. "Sure do."

"You've got to hurry, he's leaving at midnight."

"We'll be waiting for him to come past."

"Tell the boys, a million munits to the ship that downs him."

At three o'clock the next day the large man again entered Acco May's office. His eyes were blood-shot, his jowls sagged, and he walked with an air of extreme fatigue.

"Well," snapped Acco May, "what's the story?"

The large man slumped into the chair. "He got past us."

Acco May sprang to his feet. "How in thunder did that happen? . . . Four boats!"

The space-man shook his head. "I thought you said he was heading for Sanatoris Beta."

"He is, you dumb sheepherder!"

The large man glared sullenly at the passionate May.

"We was strung out along course, straight as the Galactic Liners. He came out, we saw that, but nowhere near us. Looked like he was going off more toward Alcyone."

Acco May chewed his lip. "Well, it's a cinch once he gets off course he's out of the running entirely. . . Okay then, Rock. I guess you're not to be blamed. He's off course, you say?"

"Way off course," said Rock the space-man.

Acco May smiled grimly. "Well, it's a quick way to make twelve million munits. Almost as quick as he made it off of me."

SEVERAL months later, the judge read sentence: "By your own admission guilty of piracy, grand larceny, assault and murder, I sentence you to comprehensive cerebral correction and five years close observation. Have you anything to say?"

Acco May stared at the judge, eyes like tiger-slits. "No."

The guards stepped forward. Acco May turned his head toward where Magnus Ridolph sat in dignity. He thrust aside the guards.

"Just a minute," he said. "I want to talk to that old hellion sitting yonder."

The guards hesitated, glanced for permission to the judge. But the judge was sweeping for his chambers.

Magnus Ridolph decided the matter by stepping forward.

"You wish to speak to me?"

"Yeah. I know there's about two hours of Acco May left, and after that a man looking like me goes around wearing my clothes. First I want to know how the devil did you make Sanatoris in twelve days?"

Magnus Ridolph raised his eyebrows. "By correct astrogation."

Acco May made an impatient gesture. "Yes, yes, I know. But what's the inside?"

Magnus Ridolph's gaze wandered to the Martian scarab on Acco May's finger. "The ring your—ah, frog-man found—I confess it has struck my fancy. I always envied my old friend Rimmer Vogel when he wore the ring which was so like it."

Acco May wrenched it off his finger with a savage smile. "No tickee no washee, hey? Okay, here's your fee. Now what's the pitch?"

Magnus Ridolph gestured eloquently. "Ordinary astrogation, nothing more. With the exception, possibly, of a small refinement I have developed."

"What's the refinement?"

Magnus Ridolph turned Acco May the blandest of stares.

"Have you ever examined a Mercator projection of, let us say, the planet Earth?"

"Naturally."

"The shortest course between two points, when charted on a Mercator projection, appears as a curve, does it not?"

"Yes."

"Classical space charts," said Magnus Ridolph, "are constructed after the pattern of a Mercator projection. The coordinates meet rectilinearally, the grid components running perfectly parallel but to infinity. This is an admirable system for short voyages, just as use of the Mercator projection results in little error on a cruise across Long Island Sound.

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"However on voyages of some duration, it is necessary to remember that the earth and —on a larger scale—space is curved, and to make the necessary correction. Then we find a very significant saving of time. A journey which by classical astrogation requires thirteen days," said Magnus Ridolph, turning upon Acco May his wide guileless gaze, "may be accomplished in twelve days by use of the proper correction—though to the ignorant eye, it would appear as if the astrogator is far off his course."

Acco May turned his back on Magnus Ridolph, his mouth like an inverted V. "Take me away," he muttered. "Maybe the new me will be brighter. If he is, he's going to go after that old goat and make him swallow his own whiskers."

"Get goin'," said the guard.

Magnus Ridolph dispassionately watched them leave. Then, turning his eyes to his hand, he inspected the ancient Martian scarab—breathed on it, polished it on his sleeve.

THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Continued from page 9)

Well, thanks for giving us another first, Bob—or is it Wilson? At any rate, thanks for a highly amusing letter. We read your book, The Chinese Doll, some time ago and found it a most entertaining job. Have not got hold of its successor as yet due to having kept the Schlesinger Age of Jackson so long we're afraid to show our noses in the local lending library. (To uninitiated readers—Bob Tucker uses the first name Wilson in his more commercial literary pursuits.)

We'll probably keep on punning, however.

AUTHOR—AUTHOR!

by Arthur Leo Zagat

Dear Editor: Once in a very great while a story comes along that moves me to a wistful, "I wish I could have written this." Such a one is MASK OF CIRCE, in the May SS. It is fantasy in the grand tradition of Merritt and the other giants, yet so deftly interwoven with scientific explanation that it belongs not in the realm of pure dreams but to realism.

This linking of myth and materialism, together with its apperceptive treatment of its principal character as a real human being neither wholly good nor wholly bad but the victim of that ambivalence which afflicts us all, is what makes MASK a great document.

Admirable too are not only the style, the repressed yet effective emotionalising, but the splendid craftsmanship manifested throughout. For this last, by the way, I have a hunch you and your staff must be given some of the credit. I know from experience that you insist on the highest degree of craftsmanship in the yarns you buy.

I am not acquainted with Henry Kuttner, so will you please convey to him my congratulations on THE MASK OF CIRCE. And to the staff of STARTLING STORIES a bouquet.—*1749 Grand Concourse, New York 53, N. Y.*

Golly—garlands no less! Thanks, Arthur, but we don't really see how we rate them. No one has yet had to tell Henry Kuttner how a story should be written, be it mystery, fantasy or stf. He has his own standards and they do not demand any stabs of the editorial goad.

Praise from another and disinterested author is about the highest we can get for one of our stories.

GOOD STUFF!

by Chad Oliver

Dear Editor: Y'know, STARTLING and your humble correspondent have been cruising the spaceways together for quite some time now and somewhere along the line I have been dubbed "critical"—or less savory words to that effect. You know—*Exiles From The Planetoid of Green Ghouls* must have been a classic; even Oliver thought that it was pretty good. . .

Wal sir, my criticism, such as it is, stems from a rather pathological like of stfantasy. Its more hackneyed aspects seem more trivial than ever, relative to the good stuff, if that makes any sense. Howevah, like most normal (do I hear disagreement?) people, I would much rather shower bravos than wet blankets. So—I should enjoy writing this letter. I hope you enjoy reading it.

The May SS was good stuff, Sir Editor. About the best all-around issue that my feeble memory recalls. There wasn't a poor story in the lot, and four were decidedly good.

Williams' *The Seekers* gets my nod for first place. When you went beneath the surface on this one, there was something there, instead of the customary void. I like the theme, I like the writing, I like the story very much. Thanx for printing it!

Another neat job was *The House Of Rising Winds* by the surprisingly reformed Mr. Long. Obviously, Ray Bradbury is fast becoming a major influence in science fiction, as well as the weird field. That ain't bad, pard, that ain't bad! This is not to decry Mr. Long—idea, plot, and writing in THORW were first-rate.

Kuttner's short novel, *The Mask of Circe*, was fine likewise. (Egad, this *is* startling!) Hank is nearly always an exceptional writer. *Circe* was good fantasy, a trifle weakened (as was his superb *Dark World*) by "scientific" explanations. I shall become a shunned radical and refrain from comparing him to Merritt on this type yarn. Ah me, Jason gets it this time. What next? Perhaps we should turn Mr. Kuttner loose on *Winnie the Pooh*. I can see it all now. The bear is really a robot from Neptune, and Robin a psychiatrist. . .

I also enjoyed Cummings' *The Simple Life*, more for the idea than anything else. The others were quite acceptable, though I particularly regret the implausible development of *After The Atom*. Fearn had a nice idea there.

There is a most commendable air of maturity hovering about this issue—beginning just beyond the cover, which is as usual. The writers have clearly been thinking a bit about such things as precisely where our vaunted science is leading us, and in *The Seekers* there is more than a hint about the assumed godlike stature of Man with a capital M. Thank you, Editor. Tears stream from my weary old eyes.

The long TEV was appreciated, and Cynthia Carey's

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letter on Dr. Keller especially interesting. One mistake, however—STARTLING reprinted his *Literary Corkscrew* (a wonderful yarn) back in May of '41, as well as *The Boneless Horror*. For one, I would like to see some of his new work in SS. It's plenty good—I know, because I read a few in manuscript and he read a few to me himself. Nobody can read a story like Dr. Keller. I have spoken.

With regard to the Hall of Fame in general, you are perhaps right in dispensing with it. It has not been a total loss, however—all the Weinbaum reprints have been good, for instance. Should the feature be continued, I think that you should concentrate on writers with a less transitory appeal than Ernst, Hamilton, *et al.* For example, Clark Ashton Smith or Dr. Keller. Smith's descriptive fables are as good today as yesterday, and the colonel wrote about something that does not change much with the years—basic human reactions.

Finlay's great, and so is Stevens. With that, I bid you farewell. Tungsten is waitin', and there's been a shootin' down in San Antone.—*2410 Wichita, Austin, Texas.*

The increase in size, which has enabled us to select longer stories for the Hall of Fame has given that much-maligned department a shot in the upper ulna. So you'll be continuing to see it in SS.

As for Dr. Keller, we quite agree on all counts. However, such of his recent work as has been submitted to us has run a bit more heavily to parable-sermon forms than we like to run in our magazines. Heck, we aren't out to reform the world—we're generally too busy blasting it to bits.

Give our regards to Tungsten, the steed *san peur, sans reproche et sans culottes.*

ANOTHER FIRST
by William E. Stolze

Dear Editor: Seems rather appropriate that this—my first letter to a stfmag—should be directed to *Startling Stories;* I first tasted of the forbidden fruit in the Jan., 1939 issue (Vol. I, No. 1). "The Black Flame" was, and still is, my very special favorite, and though the quality of the material in SS gradually declined thru the years, it has held a predominant position in my humble estimate for just that very reason. Have preferred to remain silent during the past decade, but feel bound to break said silence due to recently developed circumstances. So if you'll bear with me, honorable one, I'll proceed to calmly and collectively let my hair down.

After accumulating a vast repertoire of stf publications, my interest suddenly, but definitely, waned. The increasing amount of hack writing in the field, as a whole, began to take its toll on my time-worn nerves—the war acted as a stimulus—and, to make a long story extremely short, it has now been a good three or four years since I perused my last bit of fantascience.

Why then—the Great Return?

Shall we say that stf is like a strong shot of heroin? That once consumed, it creates such a livid ache in one's heart that one cannot justifiably do without it? Or is that too strong? Yet it emphasizes my feelings, dear Ed. At any rate, curiosity can kill even a Jovian were-cat, as we all know so well. So be it—I am here. Praise be to the great days of disenchantment! All hallowed by thy space-warp!

It may be of some slight interest to you to know that your competitors have failed to rise out of the mire. I discovered that before I decided to take one last fling—said fling was flung with a flang on SS—thank God. I did not have to retire again to that stagnant grave of infinite negativity that one retires to when one must do without the great light of *entertaining* stf.

I'll admit—the cover almost scared me away. But, being a hardy soul, I purchased the May SS, and what I found between those pages made me truly want to climb the snowy slopes of Mt. Zyxcbr, and shout, "Odds Bodkins!" till hell froze over.

My dear, worthy, and wordy Editor, you have done your immeasurable little bit to help restore my faith in "the great game." Please, PLEASE, keep it just that way.

Now—*avant* with the verbiage, and on with the show.

I have often wondered why stfeditors have gone to the trouble of setting up a letter dept.—and then have sat back on their proud little paunches to let the dear, worldly-wise fans go at it hands, nails, teeth, feet and toes till the Great Gawd Pulp burned like seven Devils.

The Ether Vibrates is quite a jump in the right direction—long, argumentative and more than a little thought-provoking, besides giving us a good laugh in the bargain. Moreover, your rebuttals at the close of each missive help make it something more than "full of sound and fury, etc. . ." We all have questions—if thou hast the answers, please elucidate. At least, then, we don't have to blow our batty bull to the empty breeze.

Commentary on the stories in the May issue:

1) *The Mask of Circe*—I remember the days when the fans were crying for Kuttner's scalp—hah! Long may they be forgotten. Hank has done a job here that will last with Merritt, Lovecraft and Weinbaum (take your pick!). Beautiful blend of fantasy and stf, with the accent decidedly on the former. Surprised to find you headed slightly—ever so slightly—to the left. But I always was a bit of a radical. Fortunately, a couple of good fantasies can always spice up a backbone of stf. This is crying for a sequel, so pulleeze . . .

2) *House of Rising Winds*—FBL's best since "White Barrier." Keep him writing this kind of stuff—and it wouldn't hurt to have him do a long novel in the same atmosphere.

3) *After The Atom*—Fearn has talent, when used in the right direction. Interesting.

4) *The Microscopic Giants*—I wouldn't want to see the HOF dropped out just yet; there's still a wealth of good material, as this proves. While not exactly a classic, it's stuff like this that we want for fillers, *not* the glorified adventure yarns that follow. . .

5) *The Seekers*—If Williams would dismiss with the melodrama, he would be capable of turning out some nice work. Much better than this—yet it's better than fair.

6) *Journey*—I *know* GeorgO is capable of more.

7) *No Escape From Destiny*—Never did like Zagat's yen for detective stories in this field.

8) *The Simple Life*—Too simple. Tell Ray to stop wasting his time with such nonsense, and get to work on a long epic, comparable to his early work.

So you see, even after all my previous ranting, you're still not perfect. What? Hell yes, I want perfection. (At least by giving you the heave-ho, I can hope to see you maintain the level you now hold, which is 'way ahead of the field, and far up the ladder from the bottom rung you held when I dropped out of the picture.) If, after the rest of the contemporary hack I've seen—and if, as the fans seem to think—you're still improving, I shall be blowing the tailgate on your band-wagon till Sneary learns to spell.

The controversy on the distinction between fantasy and stf is interesting. I believe you came closer to the answer when you answered John Harwood's letter by stating that the purpose of science fiction was to make the incredible seem plausible. May I go one step further, and say that the purpose of fantasy, on the other hand, is to *keep* the incredible *incredible?* Hm. . . Incredibly plausible solution, eh?

As to the discussion on Kuttner vs. Merritt vs. Weinbaum vs. Lovecraft. . . . I like 'em all. Come now, boys, I know we all have our prejudices, but isn't variety the spice . . . etc? Much as I revel in the works of the above named, I wouldn't want to spend all my life reading just one—and one alone. Which brings me to another point.

Don't ever, ever fall into a policy rut, editor—I mean, such as the type of rut which prevents you from using more than a certain dozen authors over and over again. I realize that you don't get a hundred different manuscripts every day—also that the better authors don't complete a masterpiece in a few hours—but you know as well as I that there's a galaxy of writers to draw talent from today. Enough so that you can ladle out the cream from the milk and still get variety.

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Suggestions:
a) How about a Finlay cover? Please give Bergey a long vacation, or tell him to de-sensationalize.
b) Cartier, Rogers, Schneeman & Wesso would make great "inside" men—with the great master, VF, as the nucleus.
c) Go monthly.
d) Keep Kuttner & FBLong—get LRon Hubbard, deCamp, vanVogt, Heinlein, Bloch, and try and get John Taine to do a novel for you. I still remember "The Ultimate Catalyst" in a 1940 TWS.
e) More Weinbaum in the Hall of Fame, please, a little Kline, and the first of the Arthur K. Barnes "Gerry Carlyle" series.
f) Now that you have a few dozen extra pages, why not give us two long novels every once in a while, and drop the time-wasting fillers. Four or five good stories should be preferable.
g) Where is Alfred Bester? He wrote several gems for you after winning your first contest.

Sorry, I'm at the end of my rope. (I hear a hearty sigh of relief.) But I'll be back. (And now a monstrous groan.) Sure, I know this is too damn long—but I had to get it off my chest. Next time, I'll keep it down, I promise. You can print this—in whole or in part. You can cut it to ribbons, leaving only my name and address, and a silent sniffle. You can drop it in the wastebasket. (Plunk!) But if you've gone this far, I know you've got the point of my letter, so all's forgiven.

Other than that, I'd like to know whether there are any fans down my way; if there are, I haven't been able to contact any as yet.—*P. O. Box #933, McComb, Mississippi.*

We are always on the lookout for new authors, William E. In the current year we have introduced R.C.W. Ettinger and E. Everett Evans and brought James Blish into our fold. Also the DeCourcys, Carroll, Benj. Miller, William F. Temple, John D. MacDonald, Charles L. Harness and Joe Gibson. Such veterans as Jacobi, Emmett, McDowell, Jack Vance, Ray Gallun, Leigh Brackett, Arthur Leo Zagat, Hannes Bok, Rene LaFayette and Fredric Brown have reappeared in our pages and those of TWS.

Keeping this record in mind we don't think ourselves likely to fall into the groove of just a few regulars—even when such regulars include names like Hamilton, Leinster, Kuttner, Bradbury, St. Clair, Loomis and Tenn among others. And the near double size of the books virtually rule out any such development if quality is to be maintained, much less improved.

We'll ladle out all the cream we can get our hands on.

As for your suggestions—we like Bergey and he takes orders on the covers with newsstand, not fan, sales in mind. Agree with you on the inside illustrators, but none of the boys you mention have been coming around. Going monthly is currently out of the question—but the two enlarged magazines, appearing bi-monthly, combine to make us about as monthly as we can get.

We'll keep Kuttner and Long as long as they wish to write for us. Hubbard is currently working for us but the other authors seem at the moment to be committed to other projects, chiefly non-stf. We've used up all our Weinbaums in the HoF at the moment—but the Gerry Carlyle idea is good. Two long novels don't offer sufficient guarantee of variety but you'll be getting more and longer novelets. We haven't heard hair nor hide of Bester in years.

Suggestion from us to you—write us again, and not in another nine years.

HUH?

by Rick Sneary

Dear Sir: Time, tide and publishers wate for no man, so if I expect to get my monthly dose of egoboo I had better get at it. It really does serve a perpose, I keep telling myself. By interesting the pasi-fans that write me in ative fandom, I draw in a little new blood. For example Van Couvering. 'What's that? You say a few more like him and fandom is warshed up. Yeah maybe so, but then maybe it needs a cleaning.

You know there is talk going around that for a stoy to pass you, it has to start in the present and then move off into the past, future, or other demention. And with *Mask of Circe* it is finely proved. How about explaining way. I personly don't see the point. It messed this one up good.

I guess Merritt did it, but you can go on writing like he did for ever. Or can you. Any way a couple of the best Fantasies I ever read, (and I admittedly read few) started in a nother world. Of course it might be easyer for some of your readers to fit them self into the plot worked that way, but any real lover of the strage wouldn't find it at all hard.

Speeking of the MASK. Hank is up to the old tricks. Using the same type of hero, heroin, gods as ever. And you yourself said he did. It is a neet trick, but it is a little tiresome. I'll admit there was quite a bit different about the setting this time. And frankly it had a lot more possabilities than Hank used. Why does the hero always have to be a world saver, evil killing superman? Some of the old timers nodoubt remember a little guy named Pete Manx that Hank use to fool around with. He had some reather imposable adventures, but he didn't sound quite like a superman.

One fault with this story is that Hank used names of gods and people we all have read about more or less. And I was continuly expecting things to happen as they did in the old story. In fact darn little happened tell almost the end.

Most interesting, and clearcut personality in the story was Panyr the fawn. I don't care to much for fantasy, but I like it good when it is forced on me. This was only fair. I like Kuttner, and keep on voting him best, but not for the fantasy he does.

I see the old master (?) stf hack ray cummings is back. Well as long as it isn't about Tuby it is exceptable. The only barly.

The best story of the issue was *The Seekers.* It played on a persons moods quite well. Infact I am not quite sure I agreed with the ending. New ideas, new faces are of course a good idea. But men like Vrain. . . I wonder. . . Of course I still doubt that any such man would be in any of the first rockets. But let us suppose for the sake of the story. What would happen? You would have a nother Cortez. It is possable that the Astex of today are better people. But there is a question as to way it was done.

No, I believe I would have frozen the ship and hung it by the gate. With white men left on Mars to explain the reason, I can see little harm. . . Except to the men in the ship, and they were pictured as a hard lot. As I said before, I feel sorry for any Martions if there are any. I truely do. That is inless they are smart and have death ray. In that case they can—

Say I agree with C. Duty. Rub out a few of your poet readers. With red pincle of blue automatic, it makes no diff. A few are good, you are fine. But for the most part they rime as well as I spell. . . Begone with them I say. I dielike most poems anyway. (No I'm not tone-deaf.) So Eadie Smith wants to know what I look like. Well she can come over and see if she cares. Anyone elce wanting to know just

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drop me a self adreased packing box compleet with 5 days rations and I'll come let you see me in person. Guess that is all. I see smoke coming out of the bookcase again. I guess one of the little blue men is looking at the Jan. cover again. Tosh,!—*2962 Santa Ana St., South Gate, Calif.*

You picked on the wrong point, Rick, in charging us with demanding return to the past in all our lead stories. Certainly, since the May issue, we've not been turning the clock in reverse. Hamilton's VALLEY OF CREATION in the July issue was concerned with the present, Fred Brown's WHAT MAD UNIVERSE in this one has to do with the near future, Arthur Clarke's AGAINST THE FALL OF NIGHT in the November edition deals with the far-distant future, Henry Kuttner's THE TIME AXIS in January is woven around both present and future and THE BLACK GALAXY by Murray Leinster in March tells of space travels in time soon to come.

Furthermore, only in the Clarke story, is the leading figure in any way a person of uncommon talents. Which should pretty well demolish your superman beef. By the way, do you and Stolze share the same heroin?

Undigressing for a moment, this business of author trends all too often presents one of the toughest nuts in editing. Some event or series of events in the world seems to start all our writers moving along the same track simultaneously. Especially when the stories are good it is all too easy to fail to notice such similarities—and when they are read months apart, as often happens.

KUTTNEROPHILE

by Marion "Astra" Zimmer

My dear sir: If there is any fan among the whole readership of STARTLING STORIES who, after reading THE MASK OF CIRCE, can truthfully say they prefer Merritt, with his long-drawn-out stories and stereotyped characters, to the undiminishing imagination of Kuttner's science-fantasy, then they have my sincere sympathy.

Lin Carter told me once on a time, not too long ago, that "Kuttner was just a pulp writer; Merritt a WRITER." My dear Lin; also, all other defenders of Merritt and other primitives; do you not know that Merritt's tales appeared first in the old pulps, that the pulps of yesteryear, as far as that goes, were far "pulpier" than those of today? In fact, were the paper shortage a little less acute, I have no doubt but what most of the present science fiction and fantasy magazines would print on slick paper. And after all, it is not the quality of the paper, but the quality of the stories, which makes a magazine "pulp," "slick" or "quality."

THE MASK OF CIRCE, although in my estimation not as good as my beloved DARK WORLD, far, far outstrips Merritt's long novels. Some people may say (since some unwise creature dared to accuse THE DARK WORLD of being a rewrite of *The Dwellers in the Mirage)* that *Mask* resembles *The Ship of Ishtar.* However, I am going to forestall them, and working on that basis, compare the two.

Kenton and Seward; which is fitter? Kenton, perhaps. Seward is abstract, less detailed, a pawn. Certainly he lacks the concrete clearness of Ganelon, whom even Merritt, that limner of types, never surpassed. Cyane ditto. But somehow, Kuttner's villains surpass his heroes. The faun (Panyr) is a masterful character (falling down again in comparison to Matholch the werewolf).

But it is Kuttner's plots; the logical way in which he explains the most fantastic of situations. What Merritt did—unexplained—Kuttner makes clear and plausible. Therefore, a Kuttner story enchants me *and* stimulates me as well. I am spellbound from the first page to the last. MORE.

I may say in conclusion, that Kuttner is noted for his versatility in science-fantasy such as MASK OF CIRCE, in pure fantasy such as CALL HIM DEMON, in humor such as his riotous Hogbens, in science such as LORD OF THE STORM. His detective story was the first "whodunit" I have ever thoroughly enjoyed. And in the field of the long fantastic novel, he is only doing what, if Merritt were alive today, *he* would be doing. Kuttner, far better than Bok, is fitted to carry on where Merritt leaves off. For Merritt, say what you may, was only a pioneer.

The test of a story for me is, "Will it stand constant re-reading?" THE DARK WORLD has. I have read it—by actual count—fifteen times. This contrasted with a record of four times for CREEP SHADOW and three for SHIP OF ISHTAR. Many of Lovecraft's tales have been read to death by me; yet DARK WORLD has been literally worn out (anyone have a copy to sell me?) and will probably have many more re-readings. I foresee that MASK OF CIRCE will join that and LANDS OF THE EARTHQUAKE and VALLEY OF THE FLAME in my drawer of favorites. Thanks, from the bottom of my heart, for printing it.

After that long eulogy of Kuttner and elegy of Merritt, the rest of the issue must perforce have brief treatment. 'Tis a pity too. THE HOUSE OF RISING WINDS was the best non-Kuttner, non-Hamilton story that you have yet printed. Who is this Mr. Long? Robert M. Williams of THE SEEKERS is another new name to me, but an excellent story. Cummings; by his own admission, this fellow hasn't written a decent yarn since 1930. Why keep publishing these inferior bits of hack? The rest of the shorts gave me a moderately enjoyable evening. The novelet failed to interest me, hardened fantast that I am.

One very minor gripe. Misprint or error? Jason's tutor was not "Charon"; Charon was the ferryman of the Styx. The centaur who tutored Jason was C-*h-i-r-o-n.* Remember? Kuttner, shame on you.

I neglected to write about THE BLUE FLAMINGO, but I received a very interesting letter from one Bradley, a good friend of mine, wise in all things fantastic, putting forth the theory that "Va khoseth yaga" was all he needed; he was expelled, but with the lapse of the time limit, he could enter, with that single passport. Incidentally, in what language is that meant to be? It sounds something like Egyptian or Hindu? And unlike Lin Carter, I prefer a "posed" cover to one which blazes with action. Holy Smoke-screens, Lin is monopolizing this letter.

Notes to those kind souls who mentioned me and two to those who didn't. James T. White; I'll write you personally. Thanks for calling my letter "mature". Clements doesn't think so. Edith Goldsworthy; no. Please don't have a sequel to the FLAMINGO. The obvious is never art. Bok created a masterpiece by leaving it as it was. More would be too much. Think how silly it would be to relate the "sequel" to MASK OF CIRCE, telling what happened to Jason. Or to write about what happened while Ganelon and Arles were ruling quietly over a reformed Dark World. When a story is done—it is finished. Let it rest.

Jack Clements. May I take knitting lessons from you? I really can't knit. Neither do I embroider, sew or play bridge. I'd rather write letters. And I will be very glad to exchange vitriolic wisecracks with you by private post; however, let's keep our mutual antagonism OUT of the Ether Vibrates.

Carolyn Duty. Man *is* a lower type of animal. Look at Clements. Or Joe Kennedy. Gene Hyde; "Astra" is short for "Astrafiammante", the Queen of the Night in the fantasy opera, THE MAGIC FLUTE. As a would-be musician and fantasticanne, I adopted the name, following the worthy lead of Tigrina, Shalimar and other fennes. L. L. Shepherd; in re question, YOU are a reverse-lapeled mutant if you have to tear your eyes away from the cover.

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And now, believe it or not, Astra has come to the end of her inkwell and her quill. May I leave you with a plea for more fantasy, more space-and-interplanetary tales, more humor and less "gadget" and "surprise twist" stories. And to top off the "difference" between fantasy and stef "Fantasy is the indefinable and infinite applied to a finite scale; science fiction is the improbable tessaract fitted into a three-dimensional hole."—*R.F.D. #1, East Greenbush, N. Y.*

Could be, Marion. Do we detect, by reading between the lines, that you liked and still like THE DARK WORLD? At any rate, you're certainly subtle about it.

You're so right about the Charon-Chiron controversy, if we remember our John Kendrick Bangs—incidentally, you might enjoy his old quasi-classic, HOUSEBOAT ON THE STYX. A nice fantasy with dryly humorous overtones.

You rate an overhung Bismarck herring, though, for not knowing Frank Belknap Long. Mr. Long is one of the old-hands at writing stf. He first appears on our records as author of THE THOUGHT MATERIALIZER in the Spring, 1930, issue of SCIENCE WONDER QUARTERLY, alas, now long since defunct. And his by-line has been displayed in bold type capitals many, many times since.

THOUGHTS AND QUERIES

by Frank Evans Clark

Dear Ed: You called for some ideas, discussions and opinions in the May issue of SS. Therefore, I've been wondering just to what extent is STF reading material primarily for escapists and frustrates. If you think this question shouldn't be raised publicly, don't publish this letter. My question arises from the fact that STF is so well suited for such a purpose and because it once served as an "Escape" for me.

I first started reading and collecting STF when I was laid up sick in bed for a year and thus couldn't lead a normal, healthy life. I wonder how many other fans drifted in because of similar conditions. Either they couldn't live as successfully and capably in reality as they would have liked or else they were prevented from having a normal life. Are there many such in fandom? In other words, is it dissatisfaction with one's life that leads to one's becoming an avid fan?

You can certainly find many inklings of such a state of affairs in the field. STF is divorced from reality to a greater extent than any other kind of fiction and is thus ideal for anyone who is pained by reality. I remember one of my most depressed moments resulted from reading of a guy and his 16-year-old girl friend in a story by Ray Bradbury.

I had no way of telling then when, or if ever, I would be well again and be able to get out of bed and at that time, being 15, knowing a sweet, innocent girl of 16 or thereabouts was something I thought might never happen to me, so Bradbury's story made me feel bad. A little thing, but it *did* hurt.

Things worked out fine, though, in case you're interested, and I've known well several girls around that age (Consecutively, not all at once). But, back to my point, Science-fiction contains far less of the type of story that will arouse such feelings than does other fiction. Therefore, once again, how much of STF's popularity is predicated upon this fact?

Also many stories glorify science as a panacea for all troubles. With science, you can win the beautiful girl. If you are a smart scientist, you can lick all the assorted villains anyone could conceive, plus BEMs, and incidentally save the Solar System or perhaps, if you're especially lucky, the whole universe along the way, while you're accomplishing the serious business, which is winning the girl. Remember "Five Steps to Tomorrow" in this very magazine? It said nothing else but the above. Except the scientist, ergo, the reader, saved only the Earth, if I remember correctly.

If this isn't probing too deeply into private motivations, how about some more on the question?

I'd also like to put in an opinion on the STF vs Fantasy question. I prefer fantasy (More escape?). STF is, to me, primarily plot-action writing and I much prefer mood-characterization fiction (that could be an escape mechanism, too. A bad heart keeps me from leading a basically active life). I think your mags have been slowly lowering the emphasis on the action and plot in favor of fantasy-mood, fine writing and good characterization. I believe that is for the best and I hope the reactionaries who howl for the "pure science fiction" won't make you change your present policy.

I agree comparisons are odious, as you said in the Kuttner-Merritt controversy, but I would like to add my opinion. I prefer Kuttner when he's at his best (which isn't always) because he sounds more *modern* to me. But that makes Merritt timeless, which is fine, too.

Kuttner, with proper support and guidance, can become ever greater and more satisfying to his readers and that, alas, cannot be said for Merritt. So I puts my money on Kuttner. And I also think his Hogben series is the most clever thing seen in STF-comedy.

Lovecraft—I liked him when he was writing in the Dunsany tradition far better then in his "horror-Cthulhu Mythos" mood. The stories I consider to be in the Dunsany tradition include "Celephais," my favorite (escape!!), "The Silver Key", "The Outsider" and the like. They're gems.

What gives me a laugh are these people who'll see about the Kuttner-Merritt deal, read *one* story by both and then give expert opinion on the subject. The same with those who read one or two Lovecraft stories and do the same.

I've tried to preface all my remarks in this letter with "*I* think," or its equivalent, so all the fans who may be stirred up will jump on me instead of you. Fair enough?—*113 Central Avenue, Baldwin, New York.*

Well, you've stirred up a number of thoughts in this editorial bosom—odd place for thoughts come to think of it. Naturally science fiction in its purest "scientific" or fantastic forms alike is escape.

What literature, save out and out exposition, isn't?

Furthermore, if such escape brings the escapee added detachment with which to regard the actual globe and its multifarious problems, it is a thoroughly healthy influence. We agree emphatically on the Kuttner-Merritt-Lovecraft has anybody here seen Kali? controversy. But if the kids enjoy the squabble, let them go to it. Nobody ever died of one like that.

PICTURE REQUEST

by Albert James Stevenson

SUBJ: Virgil Finley's Illustration on Page 11 of Thrilling Wonder Stories (Vol. XXXII, No. 2; June 1948)

Dear Sir: Is there any way that I can get a photograph of said illustration suitable for framing? If you cannot accommodate me, I wonder if you could suggest some way that I can get said photograph. I would appreciate any means you could advise me of.

Thank you for your cooperation and for a wonderful magazine.—*130 Scranton Street, Rochester 5, New York.*

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Sorry, but we don't know how you can get one. We only give out originals on rare occasions to benefit major fan organizations, otherwise holding them in our files. If we adopted any other policy we would not long have any to file.

COUNTERJERK

by T Sgt. John W. Patch

Dear Sir: Lin Carter complains about TEV being full of ". . . . jerks all commenting on the same stories, when nobody gives a darn what they think . . ." Pardon me, Lin, but I thought the main purpose of the readers' writing the Editor was to let him know what stories are liked best, so he can give us more of the same! At any rate, here's my choice for the May SS. I don't care whether it's printed, or not, but I *do* want the Editor to take notice.

I'm not a great lover of Kuttner, but this time he did a good job on "The Mask of Circe". Zagat's novelet was fair—nothing outstanding, though. I'm not rating the shorts against the longer stories, for the longer always have an unfair advantage.

However, I will rate the short stories—G. O. Smith's "Journey" was the best of the shorts. There's food for thought—hmm. IF the solar system IS moving faster than light (with reference to—um—you name the reference point!), what effect would that have? Probably none, since the system is out of the field of influence of any star. Or is it?

Second best short is William's "The Seekers". Third, "The House of Rising Winds" (Did Long take lessons from Bradbury?). Tied for last place are "The Simple Life" (too simple) and "After the Atom". I've left the HoFer out of the rating, for it's not fair to compare the "oldies" with modern stories. I hope you discontinue the HoF after you exhaust present selections.

My stars an' solar systems, Ed. I didn't think you were a newcomer to Stf! Or are you just innocent? I've been a steady reader for only ten or twelve years, and even I remember the founding of the SFTPOBEMOTCOSFP, if not exactly when, and by whom. Suppose you'll get a hundred answers to your question, but—it's The Society For The Prevention Of Bug-Eyed Monsters On The Covers Of Science Fiction Publications!

Rick Sneary's comments are interesting, but there is no excuse for such atrocious spelling. Those horribly mutilated words throw the reader's mind off the track and the meaning of his comments is lost. Such poor spelling would normally indicate an ignorant, or an unintelligent writer. But Sneary—once his meaning is sorted out of that jumbled mess of alphabet soup—appears neither ignorant nor dull. Must be he's just plain too lazy to learn to spell.—*Sq. E, 611 AF BU Eglin AFB, Fla.*

What has innocence, in any meaning of the word, to do with knowledge or lack of same re the SFTPOBEMOTCOSFP? We confess ourselves stumped as well as naif, dumb, ignorant, dull and incredibly lazy.

Only comment we have to make on the possibility that the Solar System is moving faster than light is that, should it be true, a lot of fine theories are going to kick the bucket, thereby annoying a lot of unimaginative theorists no end . . . which would be sort of fun.

FALLEN LADY

by Frances Schneider

Dear Ed: I feel the scaffold dropping from my feet while your angered fen shout in triumph at the fate of one who would make such statements as these. I was reared with the old-fashioned idea that a lady never, never read pulp magazines—consequently it was only a year ago that I discovered your magazine.

You are doing a fine job of presenting to the adult, who no longer has the fairy tales and myths of childhood, an imaginative literature. The well-written stories and the good illustrations which accompany them (at times) are greatly appreciated by those of us who have long sought works that were both relaxing and stimulating. The insidious manner in which themes of some stories keep recurring, forcing one to consider their possibilities, makes them fascinating beyond the pleasure received from reading them.

Mr. Mulcahy may be bored with story analysis in the letter column, but such analysis is invaluable to the new reader in showing him which plots are hackneyed and which authors may be expected to turn out good stories.—*Cincinnati 19, Ohio.*

We are grateful to your fall from pulpless grace, Frances, as for the above letter which resulted from it. And your second-paragraph flattery tempts us sorely to suggest that henceforth no letters will be printed which do not refer to our stories as "literature." But on second thoughts we fear the letter portion of the column would vanish overnight.

Literature, yet—maybe the kind you pick up on hotel desks or grocery counters. But stay with us, Frances, and write us again. You have something in your views.

BACK AGAIN—TWOFOLD

by Robyn leRoy

Dĕr Ed: leRoy iz bak! Anĕ remāning to rēd after that anounsment wil plēz be sēted. Hav bēn just tū bizē tū ryt lātlē, but hav kept up with SS and TWS as ordinārilē. Lyk kontinūd imprūvment in editorēals prēsēding TEV.

Wunr how manĕ fen who so thorolē analyz storēz (plot, styl, katakterz etc.) also luk them ovr with regard tu sykōlogikal kontent? And tū go a step ferther, noting hwich element uv hwich storē had gratest impakt on the individual rēdr, wun aryvz at verē interesting points uv understanding uv self, or uv redr huz komentz ar in kwestium.

Ur fan-org-list iz a plēzing prospect. In hwich kunekshun mā Y ad my vois tū that uv Mulcahy anent hiz suggestiun?

Sa, Ed, Y want tū thank ū for a nys koment on "Eciton", with hwich Y hav no kunekshun eksept my frendship with McDaniel.—*5521 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.*

Dear Ed: A sekund ēpisl for this munth yet!! Had alredē riten the uther, then red Kuttner'z MASK OF CIRCE. leRoy iz now kunverted, haz sēn the lyt, and agrēz Kuttner'z grāt!!! Y espeshalē lykt hiz ireverent tretment uv the Godz. Noted that hiz handling uv the inekspliкabl waz a bit fyner than the aw-striken Merritt, but with the sām konsumat artistrē and polish.

Y dū wish Hank had ended hiz opus with the lyn on pāg 60, "It was very dark here among the trees. And he was alone. . . ." Soundz mōr efektiv tū me. Ask Hank tū tern out mōr uv the sām. wil ū?—*5521 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio.*

We're glad, glad, that you liked CIRCE—also the list of fan organizations. As for the Kuttnerending, that's a matter of opinion.

INNERMOST THOUGHTS?

by P. J. Ridley

My Dear Chapple: Having just received my copy of

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the May "ish" of SS, I raise my scriber to acquaint you with my innermost thoughts. Well, here goes—

Cover—symbolic or factual? Bergey's females always look like statues to me.

"The Mask of Circe"—struck this humble reader as being pure fantasy thinly disguised as science fiction. Nevertheless I enjoyed it.

"No Escape from Destiny"—pretty good. Had me guessing.

"The Simple Life"—didn't strike the gong for me, nor did "Journey", "Microscopic Giants" nor "After the Atom." Don't ask me why, maybe I'm psychic.

"The House of Rising Winds" was, I think, the best short of this issue. FBL certainly created an atmosphere of apprehension.

"The Seekers"—very good. Illustration excellent. VF, take a bow.

TEV—a lot of the gab is over the head of a comparative newcomer to stf. My heart bleeds for George Andrews (see page 128). Question—what is my life expectation if I confess I don't care for Weinbaum? Please, no bombs through the post, the practice is frowned upon by the authorities.

Re Sneary—I have yet to see an editor whom I would address as "Dream-Boat" (no offence, Ed.).

Here's hoping Bergey's femmes come to life in (on?) the next issue.—*268 Well Hall Road, Eltham, London, S.E.9, England.*

On the whole (sight unseen and let's keep it that way) we prefer being addressed as "Dream Boat" to "My Dear Chappie." But let it pass. Your requesting Virgil Finlay to take a bow for his illustration to THE SEEKERS was a nice thought—especially as Vern Stevens did the drawing in question. You're more apt to be picketed than bombed for that one.

HARVARDIANA
by Henry M. Spelman III

Dear Editor: I just finished the latest SS. And then went to bed. But I couldn't sleep. I just lay there and thought. Gee, if I don't write him now, maybe I'll never get around to it. But who'd care? Well, it serves 'em right. I'll do it. So at 0031 I start off on this mad venture.

A bit on the subject of mad . . . when I opened my copy of the November ish, I burned. SPARX on the B list. I was ready to jump down a certain throat. But Dave Thomas held me back. "After all," he said, "mistakes will happen . . ." It was only about two months later that I was saying the same things to him. We were both aiming for the same throat. It was only an Alphonse and Gaston act that saved you for the time.

And now you are saved. SPARX made the A list. Or should I qualify the last statement. You are saved until I see what sort of treatment #6 got. I cannot speak for Dave. But I hope he'll let you live until you report on KLUGG. I hope you can take a hint . . .

Now to tear the May ish apart. Oh, what fun this will be!!!

Mask of Circe . . . Hank Kuttner at his best. Seriously, I don't think that this story quite has it. It misses fire, somehow. It doesn't send me.

The Simple Life . . . Science is all right. And the idea is fine. But it reads as though some high school freshman had written it. Ray could have done a far better technical job on the yarn.

The House of Rising Winds is good. The ending is telegraphed, but in spite of that fact, the story is outstanding. And I like the job Finlay did for it. It almost approaches the work of Cartier.

No Escape from Destiny . . . A bit confusing in places, but on the whole rather satisfactory. It kept me guessing all along.

The Seekers has been done before. But this treatment is all right. The only thing that I do not like is that, knowing Earth psychology as I think I do, we would promptly return with an A-bomb or two and wipe out the planet. But whosis' words under teleket are all too true. Even here and now too many men are all wrapped up in science for its own sake, with no recognition of what is going on outside the lab.

I suppose that Smith bought a few loaves of bread with Journey. I certainly think, though, that it was charity on the part of the editor. Nothing new but the action. And that all too trite when used in conjunction with other plots and sciences.

Ernst's little piece is OK. A few very nice and convincing points. One of the best HoF's that I've seen yet. A few such as this will almost make life worth living. Very pleasing.

Before entering the lists with the other fen, I would like to say that, in spite of the above snide remarks, you do put out a couple of very worthwhile mags. My only complaint is that they do not come out often enough.

Now, ugh, the letters. Sgt. Lane complains about putting a bit of fantasy in an stf mag. But where else could it go? And certainly The Blue Pagoda is too good not to publish. Even if only the first part gets written.

Zooks! And all sorts of little gizmochos. Don't you know what SFTPOBEMOTCOFP means? Tsk, tsk, tsk. I think is goes something like societyfortheprevention ofbugeyedmonstersonthecoversofstfpublications. (Now for about 65 deep breaths.) May I sympathize with van Couvering, and wish him the luck I got.

Dear Miss Bullock, I think you are all wet about HPL and Merritt. And, while on the subject, why try to compare HPL and Merritt? There is little in the writings of either that can be said to compare with the other. Each was very near the top in his field in certain stories and near the bottom in others. But they were both consistently good. And I guess that's enough of that.

Forgot to mention Fearn's little epic. Bah! There ain't enough free hydrogen to aid at all in the formation of a hydrosphere. So there!

Bergey is slipping a bit, I think. I don't think that the latest heroine is near as purty as the last.—*Leverett House E-21, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts.*

How didactic can you get, bub? You didn't leave us anything to answer.

DO COME IN!
by Ronald Berner

Dear Ed: May I come in and establish an understanding? Thanks, knew you would see it my way.

Have been reading the oh-so-merry TEV for some time and I think it's o.k., WITH the exception of (look out) Wigodsky. How did he ever get in here?

Attention, Joe Kirschnick—Where do you get your opium? Merritt better than Lovecraft? With tears of rage in my eyes and a lump in my throat, I say "phui." Merritt I do enjoy but for real chills it's H. P. L. all the way.

Virg. Finlay hurray. The man is superb. Speaking of the art dept. THAT cover #%"#ugh!

Stories. Hm. Well let's look at The House of Rising Winds first. That great big beautiful Long man. Shades of Bierce, what a writer. He sure rang the bell.

The Seekers may not be a typical Moore plot but I have always liked the guy. He can do no wrong. Cute is what I would label this one.

After the Atom. NO, NO, NO! It just won't do.

Journey. Not much action and not much thinking material until the last couple of paragraphs.

Simple Life—simple story. C'mon, Ray, you can and have done a whale of a lot better than that. That was just a product of an off day, wasn't it? One thing about R. C.—he always redeems himself.

No Escape From Destiny. A bow to Mr. Zagat. A really original stf whodunit. Make it another bow.

As for The Mask of Circe well I think Vernon Hodges has Kuttner pegged about right. This issue's tale wasn't too bad but nothing I would care to read again.

Oh yes:

Schaumburger's cute
A little all root
He blows his whistle
With a right smart toot.

Don't you think
Fond Ed. of mine
He can circles run round you
Most anytime?

I dare you to print that.—*166 Maple Street, Bristol, Connecticut.*

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All right, Ron,
You're really gone,
But if Schaumbere
Is quite so square
He'd run in arcs
Around our carcass
Well, who are we
To say him nee?

MORE LIKE MACHETE
by C. A. Metchette

Dear Ed: I would like to air some personal opinions and observations upon the Kuttner-Merritt controversy that is now raging. I will concentrate on Kuttner. To wit: *YOU* can have them both! *Free!*

I don't adore Kuttner and I don't particularly worship Merritt; suffice to say I read both, but not for stf, only for fantasy. Kuttner rides high, wide and handsome on that borderline between science fiction and legitimate fantasy. His recent novel, Mask of Circe, is typical of this condition: 1. Fantasy because the method of Seward's return is unexplained, 2. STF because of the explanation of the electronic properties of the Fleece and the explanation of the gods. However Kuttner does write stf: witness his Hogbens, which, Fitzgerald, he does better and more interestingly.

I don't like Kuttner in his sci-fantasy moods. I couldn't read "Earthquakes" or "Power & Glory"; but I did read and enjoy "I Am Eden" & "Mask of Circe". Why? In Eden, the scene is laid in Amazonia, and somehow, the whole adventure is made more plausible because it hinges on the cause and effect of radium radiation upon genes and chromosomes. In Circe, except Seward's recall, the explanations are based on the known or extrapolated, behaviour of electronic phenomena and furthermore, the civilization of the gods could have existed.

The latter two tales were better written and appealed stfly to me, while the former two were unpalatable. I must mention that I have not read Sword of Tomorrow or Dark World, but I hope to remedy that soon. Maybe these two tales will be of the interest of Circe.

I claim that Mr. Kuttner is a psychologist, besides being an author of stf-fan. In all his tales there is the undercurrent of human understanding, and to make such a statement requires proof. A weak proof is Kuttner's familiarity with the nomenclature of psychiatry which could have been gained by post-graduation courses. More conclusive: 1. His psychiatric comprehension of Seward's and Jason's reaction at sharing a double mind. 2. In "FURY", his skillful treatment of Sam's predicament and his solution of it. 3. "Piper's Son" and others: his understanding and explanation of the motives that drove homo sapiens to persecute a mutant race of telepaths.

As for Merritt, I am just finishing Ship of Ishtar and I honestly believe that Kuttner could not top this tale, but the same Kuttner can, and does, write an extremely interesting story and be diplomatic enough to include elements of both stf and fantasy, enough to satisfy both camps of imaginative literateurs, and to be the anguish of pure stfists, as well as pure fantasts.

Let Kuttner write more tales of Circe interest and continue to blossom out under various alter-egos; but beware! More of his Power & Glory bosh and this reader shall condemn him before a judge and jury composed of Hammond, Padgett, Hastings, O'Donnell, Kent, Garth and Edmonds; not to forget CL Moore. —*3551 King Street, Windsor, Ontario.*

Well, we hope you find his soon-to-be-forthcoming (January, 1949, SS) THE TIME AXIS among the long Kuttnernovels you go for, Herr Metchette. And what about Keith Hammond's VALLEY OF THE FLAME, published in this magazine some time ago?

JUNIOR MISSES
by Jeanette Marie Thomas

Dear Editor: I am sincerely interested in science fiction. I read all the prozines I can buy, beg or borrow for love or money. I belong to the PSFS (Philadelphia, not Portland) and subscribe to its fanzine, the "Varient".

From what I've seen of the club and of the other fen present at the Philcon, it appears that there are all too few teen-age members of organized fandom. There are all types of stf clubs, rainging from those devoted to pure fantasy, to pure science—but as far as I know there is as yet none for teenage stf fen.

I would like to organize such a club. It may be either a club that holds actual meetings, a correspondence club or both. The age limit would be from as young as an interest develops for stf to twenty years of age, at which time other clubs seem to take over.

The purpose would be to stimulate, develop and further the interest and conceptions of stf among teen-agers. The dues would be five cents monthly and, as soon as I get about five members who will contribute some material, I shall try to get out some sort of a club fanzine if I have to type it myself. I promise faithfully to answer any and all letters I receive.

I shall be grateful for any information or ideas which any of the older fen would be good enough to give me.—*2648 North Franklin Street, Philadelphia 33, Pennsylvania.*

You seem to have a sound idea there, since there *is* a gulf—all too often—between the interests of younger and older fans. But perhaps, instead of doing it alone, your missive might persuade the parent PSFS to form a junior auxiliary, to be kept alive by you youngsters successively as new boys and girls fall into stf activity. Then you'll have an assured spot to graduate into on reaching the predetermined age and have a larger organization with which to share club activities.

Good luck, whatever road you travel with your sound idea.

VIVE LE HALL OF FAME!
by E. Jordan

Dear Ed: I am distressed to read in the March issue that the question of demolishing the Hall of Fame has been introduced. It is always the first thing I look for, so please record my vote in favor of keeping it intact.

It is surprising that so many readers disapproved of the Purple Cloud story. It has remained in my memory as one of the best from the early days, while I have forgotten hundreds published more recently.

I am very glad to be receiving your magazines regularly. To be without them was one of the principal hardships of the war years. Carry on, sir, you're doing fine!—*49 Lucien Road, London, S.W. 17, England.*

Relax, E. Jordan, the good old HoF will be around for some time to come. Thanks for the nice remarks anent us generally.

SFTPOBEMOTCOSFP AGAIN
by Les & Es Cole

Dear Sir: You need not confine the SFTPOBEMOTC-

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OSFP to your private files—just become a member and let it influence your covers! As you requested, we now expand it to The Society For The Prevention Of Bug-Eyed Monsters On The Covers Of Science Fiction Publications. And don't say you didn't stick your neck out; we were hoping you'd fall into that one!

Hey! We demand a retraction! We gave the formula expressing a tesseract as V *equals* a^4. You printed it as V *minus* a^4 which is ridiculous.

Good, we've a start towards defining "science-fiction" and "fantasy". Only Paul (not Carl H.) Anderson's def was a little too restrictive. For instance, Paul, take the example of the Buck Rogers series. Therein was first described a light infantry weapon with a terrific sock. Its projectiles were rocket-powered. According to your definition that was fantasy. Some twenty years later the U. S. Army created the "bazooka" and the story becomes science-fiction.

Waal, it's all right, we suppose, but a lot of magazines are going to be printing pure fantasy if we adopt your definition. How does this sound to you? "Science-fiction" is the logical projection of scientific endeavor into imagined, although possible or even probable, situations. Defining "fantasy" would be a lot more rugged and we don't intend to try that just yet.

Our special advice to the lonely hearts column: *Achtung* Bill Groover! Les says, "Marry the gal, feller, marry the gal. Women have a natural tendency to know that their husbands can do no wrong—the first week of married life! If you marry her she'll read science-fiction just so she can compete with the rest of the gals on the block!"

Es says, "Perhaps she isn't interested in discussing science-fiction at night." Bein' as how the better half *is* a woman, Bill, she might have the right scoop there!

On the whole TEV was not so hot this issue. John Van Couvering probably had the best letter, (yes, we blush to admit it was better than our efforts) but the whole tone of the thing was decidedly underparish. And why in the name of the geologist's god Tafr do we have to have so much mud-slinging? Do all fans suffer that much from insecurity?

As usual, the shorts take top honors. Can't quite decide *which* was best, but they were all superior to the novelet and novel.

Re "Microscopic Giants", the male half of the glowing Coles, speaking as a geologist, would give his left ear-lobe to see a mine at a *forty-thousand* foot level. It's entirely possible those boys were cutting through rock which formed the original earth's crust—and *that* I'd like to see!

"The Mask of Circe" was *not* science-fiction. We're building up a terrific resistance to old Hank Kuttner. We used to like the guy, but with all the hullabaloo we've done an about-face.—*2903 Grove Street, Berkeley 3, California.*

Okay, okay, so we bit in our innocence. But we still like Kuttner *and* occasional mud-slinging *and* the way we printed your formula.

FEMMEFEN
by Linda Bowles

Dear Editor: I slowly, unbelievingly, count the number of femme letters and when I make sure I'm not dreaming I quietly faint. After a considerable lapse of time I pick my trembling body from the floor and look again. It's true! We girls were really out in force this ish. Bless your heart, Ed., I could kiss you for that! (well, we're waiting—Ed.) I wonder how our woman-hater, Jack Clements, will bear up under the barrage.

"Knit one, purl two." Hmmph! Jackie-boy, don't you know that the days when a woman sat at home and did that are gone forever? Today, this is just as much a woman's world as it is a man's. What do the rest of you girls think?

I can't find too much to gripe about this issue, but since I'm sprouting my motheaten wings for a try at active fandom, I may as well dig up something to yell about like the rest.

Bergey's cover was awful again—but then it usually is. I just looove the way his colors clash. That eye and that sickly yellow! Yipe! Well, Berg, ole man, try again next ish. What *AM* I saying?

Finlay's artwork was wonderful—but look who he is—the almighty Finlay. Looove that man. The HoF was poor this time. Don't know why, but I just didn't like it. On the whole I hate whodunits—but NO ESCAPE FROM DESTINY was a fairly interesting yarn.

THE MASK OF CIRCE was very good, even though it was an overgrown fairy tale. I enjoyed it very much. The rest of the stories were good—no comment.

Now for the best section of all—I missed Wigodsky (the little horror) this issue, not because of his rambling gibberish but 'cause I grow accustomed to seeing certain names appear each ish. If he can do it, so can I.

Eadie Smith asked a question that has puzzled me. What *is* a John Van Couvering? If you get an answer, Eadie, let me know. Does George Andrews by any chance eat dog biscuits. His poetry gives one that impression.—*931 North Jackson, Topeka, Kansas.*

And let's cut out this long distance kissing, Linda. Closer or not at all!

DIFFERENT—BUT HOW?
by Lynn H. Benham

Dear Sir: If you're observing, you've noticed that yours truly hasn't written a fan letter in quite some time, but I felt that comment on the May issue was virtually a duty. Ordinarily I don't care too much for fantasy, but the one by Kuttner seems to be "different" some way. Maybe it's just the Kuttner genius at work but, whatever it is, *The Mask of Circe* is an excellent story.

It is one of those that, when started, is read through to the end before laying down the book. Any fantasy story that commands MY attention so strongly MUST be good, for I consider myself to be very critical, and don't take just anything in the way of composition that is pushed at me.

Williams and Smith (in my opinion) wrote the two best shorts, and I kinda liked the idea used in the novelet, but I don't know how to rate the feature story. About all that can be said is that it was very good, without going into raves over it.

Incidentally, congratulations on the larger size—I hope this isn't a way of raising the price and that after a few issues you will go back to the old size. But, I guess inflation hits everything alike, with no preferences.

The main reason for my not participating in the fan-fest (consisting, it seems, mostly of rather inane feuds), is that I've been rather busy, and didn't have time to write, although keeping up on the issues as they come.

Another thing, I notice that there aren't very many Chicagoans with their gripes and otherwise in the reader's columns. Is this because they are all in a daze and don't know what is happening, or are they just merely taking in everything with no comment? I'd like to know. The idea of a fan club seems a little top-heavy, but I'd like to know why it is that 99% of the people that know about scientific fiction say that it is silly, trash, and other synonyms to wit. Keep up the good work.—*6144 Dorchester, Chicago 37.*

Have you been conducting a poll to get the 99%, chum? And how do you know those queried know anything about it. Is the name Gallup—or Kinsey?

At any rate, our second upping in size within six months should put your expressed fears re our inflation policy to rest.

OFF WITH HIS HEAD!
by Marion Miller

Sir: I've never written before but sometimes I've been mad enough and pleased enough to do so. Now I see I must. If anyone tries to compare with Merritt, off with his head—it is impossible.

If you or any of your readers can tell me a way to obtain "The Fox Woman" and inform me if Merritt

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ever wrote a sequel to "The Moon Pool", I'd appreciate it. I have all except the above.

I enjoy SS very much and think it is improving—how I don't know, but it sure does read better.—*2311 Reed Avenue, San Diego 9, California.*

"The Fox Woman", begun by Merritt and completed by Hannes Bok, was published by the New Collectors Group of New York (see the Science Fiction Book Review in this issue), as was the more recent "The Black Wheel" by the same authors. You can obtain needed information by writing in for a copy of the Fantasy Review, whose address and price is listed in the current review of Science Fiction Amateur Publications. To the best of our knowledge Merritt did not write a sequel to "The Moon Pool."

BETTER LATE . . .?
by Franklin M. Dietz Jr.

Dear Editor: Very late with my letter to you for the past issue, but, though very late, I'm writing anyway. The reason is, of course, that I had the first ish of my fanzine to get ready for the printers. And when getting an issue of a fanzine out, one just doesn't have time for reading or letter writing.

There has been much discussion of late on the topic of what is fantasy and what is STF. From the letters in the May ish of SS, it seems that quite a lot of people are all mixed up. FANTASY actually embraces all futuristic and supernatural stories (except weird and horror).

But, in the present day, those fantasy stories which are scientific (STF) in nature are called science fiction, and the rest (for want of a better description I'll call them mature Fairy tales), the rest are called fantasy stories. As before indicated, I am not including weird or horror stories in this discussion.

Another topic which requires discussion, I think, is your coming 'fan-organization registration' department. This is a very good idea, even though already in another STF magazine. BUT I think that just fan-club registration won't make a department worth a darn. Nothing to it! Now, if you took Dan Mulcahy's idea, as given in The Ether Vibratess, and incorporated it with the Fan-club registration department, then you would have a real department, interesting and informative both.

But now you say where are we going to, and how are we going to get the fans interested in writing a letter about their organization. Well, from my contacts in fandom, and my own fanning, I believe that most fans would be more than willing to write a letter telling all about their clubs. All that would be necessary would be for you to tell us that you desire such letters.

So, I guess that's all I have to say for now. See you next issue.—*Box A—Employee, Kings Park, L. I., New York.*

As you may have gathered by this time, Franklin, we are not making a separate department of our fan organization registration—never intended to, in fact. And the lads and leddies are writing in as you believed they would.

Re fantasy versus stf—the crux of the puzzle seems to be that they do overlap, or rather that stf is a sector of fantasy. An attempt by the author at some sort of quasi-logical explanation seems to us to be the badge of science fiction as distinct from other branches of fantasy.

MAJOR AND TWO MINORS
by Rosco Wright

Dear Editor: In reply to your query in the May Ethergrams—I am a freshman at the University of Oregon in Eugene. However, I'll probably be a father before this reaches your office which is a roundabout way of saying that I'm not exactly a "little-bit-of-freshman", not in ever respect anyway!

My major will be Education as soon as I get my junior certificate in Liberal Arts. Such a major also calls for two minors. At present one of my minors is English and the other will probably be Biology. In case anyone is interested the hardest things are: (1) living on ninety a month; (2) spelling. All in all I must be a rather lucky buzzard.

Now that you have immaculately, dissected, classified, and filed another of your fair-hearted boys—shall not the said entity proceed with a similar treatment of the May STARTLING?

The cover was not cluttered up with extra detail and the color combination was in good order—the Earl of Bergy can relax and continue to ignore me. The interior makeup shows vast improvement. I am very fond of the various styles of type used and especially of the fact that they are varied and not crowded on a space the size of my thumb-nail.

THE HOUSE OF RISING WINDS—Frank Belknap Long seems to be doing better lately—with fresh ideas and a more literate handling—better atmosphere and interesting characters. Yes, I know, some reader is bound to say he used poor 'inglish' and that his characters are flat.

THE MASK OF CIRCE—Henry Kuttner obviously tried desperately to do a superior job on this novel—and he did. The opening paragraphs were as spell-binding as the opening of Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" and Kuttner's closing was artful and well balanced with the plot. Here and there in the story were bits of dialogue and expressions of thought that sounded like run-of-the-mill "pulp" phrases. They were the more discordant because of the fineness of the rest of the novel and were so few that it really is rather mean of me even to mention them—I'll bet Hank could weed them out and have a great book for the fantasy book publishers.

THE SIMPLE LIFE sounds slanted toward the SATURDAY EVENING POST and is good—extra good for variety. The best Cummings yarn in years and years. THE SEEKERS—Williams has such a sympathy for the theme of his science-fiction that it has to be good. NO ESCAPE FROM DESTINY—good crime yarn. JOURNEY—Gee! He got her! AFTER THE ATOM—a severe blow to man's ego—which is a pretty nasty ego in most cases. The Hofame as usual would make inlaid lanoleum for the bottom step of the standard cut for the same—it was flat enough.—*Rt. 2, Box 264, Springfield, Oregon.*

Good luck, Rosco—but we do hope you have to lay some kitchen linoleum soon in a moving trailer while travelling a dirt road during a spring thaw.

HURT
by Gwen Cunningham

Dear Editor: I have a Finlay portfolio handy in my living room. When guests arrive, do I fool around showing them silly things like me in levis up to my neck fishing for trout? Or gurgling babies, in the middle of a bath? Or a group of scrawny faced mountaineer-type relatives, standing by a cabin door? No! Heaven forbid! I want them to visit me again. So I get out the old Finlay portfolio, and give them the thrill of their lifetimes.

I have felt very hurt lately, because you do not print my letters. So I began to wonder if you could even read them. On that premise, I borrowed a Royal from a kind neighbor and hope this time I'm lucky. At least I hope you can read this better than my usual attempts.

A lot of readers seem to ignore rating the stories, but to me it is a very important duty of the fans. How else can you editors know how much we like or dislike a story, anyhow?

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So here goes for my usual comments.

Zagat's "No Escape From Destiny"—a fair story, interesting enough to read, anyhow.

Kuttner—well, he always hits the gong, as far as I'm concerned. "Mask of Circe" was no exception. Excellent work—fine idea—good plot.

Cummings' shortie was cute and had more truth than poetry in it. The sly humor of his gentle sarcasm, as usual, cheered up my sour disposition and made me laugh out loud. No doubt about it—Cummings is a good writer.

Frank Long's "House of the Rising Winds" had a haunting quality I like, and an innuendo of weirdness that gave just the right touch of variety to this issue. Another great writer.

Bob Williams' "Seekers" was fine also. I generally feel very fond of the gentle races described in stories like this. I've not read William's work often enough to remember him before, but now I will look for more by him.

George Smith's "Journey" was a little too dry to interest me. It may have been very good work, but no doubt I'm a bit lacking intellectually. I'm not against stellar math and space drives and dizzying light years. But in this story—so what?

Ernst, in his "Microscopic Giants" wrote a cutie. I'd like to learn more about the heavy little men, with the nasty little weapons. What makes them tick, etc. Might be a good story in finding out more about them. Hmmm?

Fearn, in "After the Atom", was good as a story, but how I long for more and more good writers to look into this possibility—learn all the theories and write them up so we can picture them for ourselves, as possibilities. It is, as the saying goes, later than you think. And the more we can learn about the possible outcome of atomic warfare, the better off we will all be. I know personally I'm terribly anxious to read all I can about this subject, but the learned treatises are beyond me. A few learned writers could be the medium of our understanding. I think, seriously, we need more and more intelligent POSSIBLE stories of this type. So I thank Mr. Fearn for his very timely story. Let's have a lot of them.

"The Ether Vibrates" found a real star, this time. Joe Shaumburger was really super. I really got a kick out of his blank, blank verse. As for Gerry de la Ree, if he doesn't like St. Clair, phooey, why doesn't he go out and buy a Disney Comic? For those of us who like the Saint, Clair that is, please give her a kiss and let her stay. We won't let the nasty man get tough with her! And that's a promise! You can also ignore his idea about dropping the Hall of Fame. In fact, if you ask me, Mr. de la Ree gave pretty high-handed orders all on his own, didn't he? I hope you wait for the votes of all of us before you run to do his bidding. Who does he think he is, anyway?

I wish to add one rather sharp criticism of Ye Editor. Here I am writing my heart out, and sincere about it, too, but letter after letter gets lost in your waste basket. Of course I admit there are some who write better than I. But alas! When I find jack clements of ohio getting in print by no other means than a lot of nasty cracks and no capitals, I have to holler. That about the capitals is a mean under-handed trick. He's trying to go Rick Sneary one better. But I believe Sneary is honest about his spelling. You can't tell me clements wasn't ever shown what a capital letter is! Not if he reads "Ether Vibrates"!! So I have to tell you that I feel very disappointed in you, Ed. Do I have to write my letters backwards or something, to make you read them? Well, darn it, I won't. If my forward writing isn't enough, I'll sit down and write letters to the Spirits. They won't answer me either.

This letter is probably so long you won't print it, anyhow. Isn't that just my luck? But I don't worry. Next month, maybe, I can write you a short, sweet letter, like "Phooey" or something, and you'll be able to squeeze me in. (Not too tight, PLEASE!)—*8519 MacArthur Blvd., Oakland 5, Calif.*

Gwen, your writing is forward enough and aren't you indulging in a bit of hyperbole with that "letter after letter" business? Glad you liked the May issue and St. Clair.

So you give your guests a bubble bath with the Finlay portfolio—well, perhaps they need it.

UNKINDEST CUT OF ALL!
by Furman H. Agee Jr.

Hi, Bub: Here's something different. As long as you're taking up valuable space with a lot of drivel by other drips you just as well take up a little more for more of the same while I unburden myself of some verbiage that has been accumulating for lo, these many years.

Contrary to the expostulation of the greater majority of participants in your "grand old order of vibrating ether," I read the stuff when, and *only when*, I have exhausted all other reading matter. (This happens all too often as I just can't seem to obtain enough Science Fiction.) The above statement will probably disqualify me as an analyst of things to do but here goes—the mouth is open—and ready for the feet. . . .

The question before the house is: HOW CAN ANY REAL, HONEST TO GOSH, SCIENCE FICTION ENTHUSIAST DESIRE A LARGER (OR EVEN ANY) DEPARTMENT IN A MAGAZINE THAT TAKES UP SPACE WHICH COULD BE USED TO AN ADVANTAGE BY PRINTING ANOTHER STORY????????

I propose this—especially during these days of paper shortage—*cut out the friction and print more fiction.* Printed opinions on the merits or demerits of certain stories only prove one thing—ALL PEOPLE DON'T THINK ALIKE—AND SOME PEOPLE DON'T THINK, PERIOD. Anyone with even juvenile intelligence realizes this, so why waste space in each issue repeating this known fact. After all, to one who really appreciates Science Fiction, there are only three kinds, good, better and best.

You, to be the editor of a successful publication have to be a reasonable judge of the qualifications of all three. Time spent reading "Letters to the Editor" of the type printed (the majority of same), I will admit, can be of advantage to you in one way; it gives you an idea what the letter writers desire. You notice I said, *letter writers.* The majority of purchasers, and subscribers (like myself) read on for years and show their approval or dislike by buying or leaving strictly alone, your offerings; bursting into literature only on rare, VERY RARE, occasions.

While I'm at it, I had just as well cover the field. Take illustrations. Having had training (two years) *some time ago in commercial art, I think I am* qualified to judge a little, *and only a little,* the skill of application and aptness of illustration. Some of your presentations are definitely pleasing to the esthetic senses and others, frankly, are not worthy of a second glance. So what!!? Admire and absorb the beauty of those which are pleasing, and don't give the others the second glance. Are the pro and con statements regarding the relative values of each portrayal worthy of using paper and time that could be used, I repeat myself, TO PRINT ANOTHER STORY?

Also, the time you, dear Editor, have to spend in composing answers (and in verse, blank and otherwise, yet) could be of much more value if used in judging those good, better and best stories, and figuring which one would fit in the space saved by eliminating the noble efforts of those who like to see their name in print.

Yours for THE INSTALLATION OF *MORE* SCIENCE FICTION, MADE POSSIBLE BY THE ELIMINATION OF PERSONAL EXPOSTULATON.—*5524 Lakeside Avenue, Richmond 22, Virginia.*

Okay, dear alleged readers, let's hear *your* opinions on this one. It seems to us our two enlargements should do something to allay glutton Agee's insatiable appetite for stf.

ROSE KNOWS—OR DOES HE?
by William E. Rose

Just who's kidding who is the question,
In this mass of printed congestion,
Called Fantasy, Science and Fiction, by expression
And literal diction in the columns of ether vibrates.
My advice to those seeking science
(In many a musty and erudite tome)
Should diligently seek through appliance,
Quiet hours neath the library's dome,

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Alone with larvae and cobwebs,
They would be completely at home.
I like the old book as it's printed,
With fantasy fiction galore,
More science would crumb it entirely,
And make its concepts a bore.
This is only my humble opinion,
It surely will cause no uproar,
In the executive chambers of Saturn,
The Guzzling Sargent of yore.
As I close this modest epistle,
My being subconsciously yearns,
To meet and belabor a person,
With nondescript surname of "Burns!"
But perhaps it's the time and the season,
That mayhem and homicide turns,
Without any rhyming or reason—
Just to throttle a guy that's named Burns!—
P. O. Box 430, Beaumont, Texas.

Your usual metrical missive is hereby quite
gladly received
It finds us quite gaily submissive in spite of
the fact you sound peeved
We take joy in the fact that you find us
interesting as of yore
And the fact that you don't seem to mind us
nor think us a thing to deplore
But after re-reading your 'pistle, with all of
its twistings and turns
We can't for the life of us whistle up motives
for throttling one Burns
Perhaps in your next you will tell us your
reasons for wishing him woe
And if it is not out of season the why-for of
hating him so

THE HUMAN BEM RETURNS
by Michael Wigodsky

Dear Sir: I went to the newsstand. I looked at the stacks of magazines. Then I went to the back of the store. The owner was holding up copies of STARTLING and (censored). Both were marked W. He saved them for me.

I buy them and take them home. Naturally I read STARTLING first. Naturally I read the letter column first. Naturally. I comment:

There's quite a row on.
So from now on
I will asperse
In verse.
The editorial
Touches on a subject immemorial,
Also the editor quoted Gilbert's song
Wrong.
In the next issue:
Good stories, I will miss you.
On the subject of "Yaga, va khoseth,"
Poul Anderson cannot bhos(t)eth.
Double-talk I like
And *you* know my name is Michael, not Mike.

I will not write the rest of this letter in verse, it is too much trouble.

I do not agree with Mrs. Burkhart. To me, it seems that a sequel would be a great disappointment. Bok, in the closing pages, worked up a great deal of suspense. Any thing he could possibly think up to follow this would be far below the level of *this* story.

About that Captain Suture business, one of your competitors beat you to it. They have a character called Old Doc Methuselah. He's very popular too.

Huh! I can't think of anything to say about T/5 James G. White's letter!

If no story can be reprinted until it is at least ten years old, I recommend that the HoF be kept until May, 1950, so that Kuttner's BEAUTY AND THE BEAST may be reprinted. It is a minor masterpiece. It was printed in the April 1940 TWS.

Why is it that people try to explain all history with pre-historic atomic bombs? Remember the time Heinlein hinted that the moon craters were caused by atomic bombs?

The last paragraph of Kirschnick's letter sounds like an attempt to start one of those "How do you know that you know?" things. Remember Shaw's diatribe on the distance between the sun and the earth?

Lin Carter: Nothing can be said about Lin that the editor hasn't punned before.

Thanks for the compliment, Shammy. I'll say that you're on the beam sometime too. You aren't in this letter, however . . . bibbledy!;:!*.

By the way, is sic an abbreviation of sick?

I just realized that I skipped all the letters between Sue Chadwick and Don Day. I go back.

To George Andrews: Remember Kipling's "Who can doubt 'the secret hid under Cheops pyramid' was that the contractor did Cheops out of several million!"

In my opinion the early TWS should be turned to for HofF selections.

Then comes Steamboat (round the bend) Sneary. Let us sneer.

He (Roscoe E. Wright) is studying under Harold Lloyd Roscoe, I mean FEWright. Or am I thinking of Eric Frank Russell?

Did I forget to tell you that I (me? we?) moved to Chicago?

Mulcahee! Does it wrym wit lil b'lee?

W. E. Rose mentions Urania. Has he heard that, according to the INFORMATION P—E ALMANAC, the principal use of Uranium at the present time is in the ceramics industry?

I have a pome:

The boy stood on the burning deck, (of cards)
Burning STARTLINGs by the peck! (Query: What is a peck?)
His father called him but he would not go, (disobedient)
Because he hated M—n so (Just like me!)
(I'm only kidding, kid!)

Alas! By Keller, I have only read STENOGRAPHER'S HANDS, THE LIFE DETOUR & THE BONELESS HORROR

A John Van Couvering is defined by Klebster as: "The third transformation in Glabning's extrasion scale."

I was eleven when I wrote my first letter. I'm twelve now. I'll be thirteen in May. May 23. Do you want to send me a present?

JVC hints that I, Wigodsky, usually say nothing in five lines. He also hints that in the Janiveery SS I said nothing in fifty lines. There are rumors that JVC has been known to say nothing in 500 or even 5000 lines. So there!

I'll send La Bullock a loaf of stale butter. 'She.' doesn't.' like.' Lovecraft.'

Oh! That was Jick clemensy who made the crack I attributed to JVC. But JVC said something to the same effect.

Then there's this Harwood guy! I like Burroughs too, but I think that the Burroughs worshippers (that means *you*, V. D. Cortell) are crazy! There! I've said it and I'm glad! Glaad! Glahd!

Carolyn Duty berates me for my spelling! Hah! She mispells her own name! Everyone knows her name is Carlinn Duse.

Bolker has never read an uninteresting SS lead-novel! Hah! What about THE GODS HATE KANSAS?

Groover called Weber a Neanderthal. He means, of course, a Cro-Magnon.

Huh! For once, I'm not going to insult Connor. I agree with him! A miracle!

Where's Dr. Jekyll? He's tanning Gene A. Hyde. (Thanx to Jack Smith)

What do lapels have to do with bustles? What do bustles have to do with lapels? And what does either one of them have to do with my spelling?

I will comment on two things in ROTSFFP. First: Who is Sprague de Campon? Second: When you said that the poetry made the November GORGON special, were you referring to my poem? (No! ED.)

Surprise: I'll now comment on the stories.
Kuttner was exceptional.
Zagat was fair.
Cummings was fair.
Long was fair.
Williams was fair.
Smith was fair.
Ernst was very good.
Fearn was terrible.

As for the illustrations, the least said the better.—*7744 Ridgeland Avenue, Chicago 49, Illinois.*

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We consulted the local G&S authority on that quotation from "Iolanthe," Mikhael. He is more hurt than you at being caught with his breeks at half mast. Sic means so, exactly so, so what or so that's exactly how it is.

We too have a pome
We wish you'd take a moistened tampon
And wipe out ref. to Sprague de Campon
Then tell the 'sembled gals and boys
Just why you moved to Illinois.
And save our editorial muscles
From tying up lapels with bustles.

We'll leave your spelling out of it, Mikhael.

YELLOW HORROR

by Billie Lee Randolph

Dear Ed: What happened to Bergey? For awhile he was improving so much, now he goes crazy again. Look at that bright yellow background! And his babe is not half as nice as she used to was.

I wish to know something about ERB, so I could add my bit to all this info about the sun inside the earth. Perhaps I could say something anyway. (I love to talk about things I don't know anything about) I have thunk. Here is my glorious contribution. "Ahem . . . hem" (Said self-consciously)

Now that we have gotten into the swing of things, maybe I can say something sensible for a change. (Keep quiet, you kibitzer). I bet you never had a reader as crazy as I am!

The first letter I want to tear to pieces is one by a horrible creature called jack clements. Not only did he run myself into the ground, he maliciously tells all fem-fans to go knit socks! Now is that nice? Really, Jack, we're nice kids, you should get to know us a wee bit better.

According to Paul Anderson, most of the so-called science-fiction is really fantasy. *I* disagree. I think a story is SF if its plot is based on a scientific problem. It's fantasy if the characters go around dashing into other dimensions with only a wave of the hand and a few magic words.

I agree with Rick Sneary that a lot of earth's people are getting pushed around a lot. I wonder what a super civilization on Mars or Venus would think of all our puny quarrels.

I read in the paper lately that we now have a radioactive cloud that is quite deadly. In the same article they mentioned that the atom bomb is now outmoded. Who wants to bet that stf will have to run some to keep ahead of our bloodthirsty scientists?

My favorite story this ish was one of the shorts. *The House of Rising Winds* made me shiver and then cheer. I like stories with children as heroes and heroines, they are the most lovable.

The Hall of Fame was fine this time. Like all the old classics, it left the possibility of defeat in the air. Only idiots believe that everything turns out all right all the time.

I know that I'll be chopped to pieces by Kuttner fans, but I'll risk anything for duty. I haven't liked *any* Kuttner that I can remember. His style just don't click with me.—*3355 San Fernando Rd., Los Angeles 41, Calif.*

Too bad about Kuttner and Bergey—but don't fret overmuch, Billie Lee. It is highly doubtful that either will starve for some time to come irregardless.

You gals really seem to have bitten (as well as been bitten by) clements. We have a horrid suspicion things are working out as intended by him. Maybe he simply wanted a new pair of socks.

We'll reserve opinion on the opinions of Mars and Venus anent Tellurean squabbles until we get direct word from the planets mentioned. Yours till the first radioactively cloudy day.

DO TELL!

by Ed Cox

Dear Editor: The May issue of STARTLING STORIES arrived today and it's getting so long now that I have to write two letters on one issue! I have only read the letter column and the fanzine review so far but the rest of the mag surely looks wonderful.

The main reason I'm writing this letter is this: LIFE DEFINITELY EXISTS ON MARS!! By this time you know all about that but now that we know that mosses and lichens (probably bacteria, too) exist, what may have existed before and how is this discovery going to effect the science-fiction stories that authors will write about Mars in the future? There are endless possibilities to be explored and written about, now.

How will the authors explain the life and what might have inhabited Mars? True, many stories, so very many, have been written on this subject, but now that we KNOW, how will the authors treat this subject?

The report says that there can't be any "monsters from Mars" but what about the possibility of a race of Martians *still living* on the planet that have gradually evolved over the centuries to a point where they need not breathe air (by our standards) or very much if there is enough left on the planet to breathe?

Now we know that these low forms of plant life most probably exist. How do we know that they are *plant life?!* Many times in science fiction stories, there have been highly evolved forms of plant life. Maybe that life on Mars is like the "biopods" in Stanley G. Weinbaum's A MARTIAN ODYSSEY.

Well, I've said enough on this subject for now. But wait until they get the two hundred incher turned on Mars! Then we'll find out something! But wait 'till 1956 when Mars will be only 30,000,000 miles away!!

Now for a few comments on the May SS. Ah, haaa. . . I see you have a new, small size print in TEV. Now there's lotsa room for more letters! As the current fad seems to be to take up letters separately, here goes on a few.

Paul Anderson: I agree with our Ed. Ya can't quite classify stf and fantasy like that! I'll go into this subject in some other letter.

Gerry de la Ree: interesting info. And congrats on LOKI!

Rick Sneary: Hamilton's story was good! But Bok's wuz better!!

William E. Rose: Gad! Where's muh dictionary!

Cynthia Carey: Wow! You told 'em, but there may be other people who feel exactly the opposite about his stories. Wonder what'll happen, now?

Linda Blake: Trying to break into fandom??!! Rash girl! Good luck!

Les and Es Cole: Yah, what's SFTPOBEMOTCOFP?

Joe Kirschnick: That question! Man's mind can't grasp it, that's all. (Ed. That wasn't a mild pass at Forry, was it!!??!)

Lin Carter: You're right about the cover but Bok can't quite match Merritt. A lot like him, but there's something in Merritt's stories.

Joe Schaumburger: Hey! Free verse! That was *good!!* Do it again.

John Van Couvering: Oh, yah? I saw your pitcher. You ain't old!! Hah! I've betrayed you. . . . Don't! Don't! (Blue pencil hovers . . .)

Jerri Bullock: Fitzgerald (Jenkins) I've heard, is a scientist!! How can you say that about HPL??!! And Merritt was best at stories like DWELLERS IN THE MIRAGE and THE SHIP OF ISHTAR than at SEVEN FOOTPRINTS TO SATAN, etc. And Cap Future would do better than that!

jack clements: i'm going to write a letter with all words in caps someday! i also agree with you about rick. if he doesn't do that on pupose, he's a borned genius!! but you're in for it on the fem idea, tho. the more fannes, the better. congrats to all the fems that wrote letters this issue!

Well, Ed., this is all. I'll write a letter on the stories soon. Oops, I haven't mentioned anything about the fanzine review section yet! I agree with

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the fellow (I forgot who now) who asked for more pages devoted to reviewing the fanzines. At best, all you can do now is to give a sketch of the contents of the fanzines. Now that I'm on this subject, I can't think of anything else to say!

Now that I'm well on the third page, I want to say a little about something that has irked me no end for many, many moons. It is the apparent lack of fans in Maine. As far as I know, there are but four or five of us. Russ Woodman, Norm Stanley and I are the only ones that seem to be active at all and Norm Stanley doesn't seem to venture outside FAPA very much. That just leaves two of us!

So, if this letter sees print, Maine fans, heed this: Come on and get busy! Write in to the letter columns and make yourselves known! Maine is way behind most of the other states in fandom!! Come on, get those letters in!! It's fun writing 'em! (Tho Ye Olde Editore may have other ideas about them when he gets 'em!). S'long for now "dream boat"! (I wonder why Rick called you that?!)—*4 Spring Street, Lubec, Maine.*

Don't ask us, Ed! In fact, don't ask us anything at the moment. Let us just hold our head in our two feet. *En passant,* peasant, that was quite a hunk of campfire speculation on life on Mars. And—just to add a final touch—has it ever occurred to any of you alleged thinking machines that life might exist on other planets but in such form that no human being could recognize it—or vice versa? In which case we would never know.

WOE IS US!
by Eunice Schaver

Dear Editor: I have just finished the May issue of Startling Stories, and having read also the letters from the fans decided to drop you a guided missive of my own. Look out when it lands.

As it seems to be the custom to class the stories and articles I think I will take a shot at it. I especially like the reader's page or "Ether Vibrates" as it is called.

Strange as it may seem I agree with Jack Clements about the letters you get from the female fans. I say they (meaning the female fans, including me) surely could write one letter to put the male fans in their place. Woe is us. Haven't we at least one intelligent member on our side? Come on, girls, let's show them.

As for Joe Kirschnick, I'd like to see more of his letters in print. He really has a sense of humor. Lin Carter is good too. Eadie T. Smith ditto, except for his defence of Rick Sneary. Rick doesn't know all the answers, he only thinks he does What does he mean, Weber should get lost in the Fields? He should get lost (meaning Rick Sneary) in Atlantis or some place. He's a throwback.

Now for the stories—

The Mask of Circe—Something was missing and I don't mean Jason.
The Simple Life—Good enough said.
The House of Rising Winds—Really, MR. Long, we aren't children. UGH.
No Escape From Destiny—Number 1 triffic.
The Seekers—Swell.
Journey—I'm glad he wasn't gone twenty years. I always like for the hero to get the girl.
The Microscopic Giants—Almost number 1.
After the Atom—Good but gruesome.

I guess I'd better close. I don't want to fill your waste basket with only one letter, because I intend to write more. Keep up the good work. An old fan who finally got the courage to write.—*1010 South Flores Street, San Antonio, Texas.*

Intelligent females wanted? Are you spoofing? We were under the definite (if perhaps erroneous) impression that Eadie was and is a lady. Doesn't the song say so?

As for the Weber & Fields fiasco, Eunice, you can't be so old if you missed that one. Keep writing, baby.

'ROUND AND AROUND AND AROUND WE GO
by Keith Johnson

Dear Editor: When I saw the name of Kuttner on the lead novel, I knew that you had come up with another good story, and I was right. The Mask of Circe was a fantasy that I couldn't put down until I had finished it.

You notice the word fantasy? In my opinion all science-fiction could be lumped into the broad category called fantasy. Labeling a story as such merely means that it is a product of imagination, and does not mean that the story contains, or is in itself a basic untruth. Enough for fantasy.

The short stories were passable, and the H. of F. story was one of the best you've printed for quite awhile. Usually these so-called classics are a big bust.

The Ether Vibrates was lively as usual with a wealth of good and bad ideas. Only criticism I have concerning this is the tendency to print too many letters from old standbys. A few are all right but I like to hear from new voices with new ideas, preferably someone who never heard of Merritt and didn't try to decide if Kuttner can take his place. Kuttner is good enough to make a new niche for himself, and not just take over an old one left vacant.—*326 W. Adams St., Macomb, Ill.*

You make good sense on both sore subjects, Keith. And if we run a number of "old standbys" it's because, in our humble opinion, those we use more than once write interesting and/or amusing letters. Next, please.

LIFE'S AMBITION
by Jim Goldfrank

Dear Ed: Believe it or not I'm beginning to rhyme, I've wanted to do this all of the time!!

But the print on TEV's pages is getting too small. Won't I be able to read it at all???

That was just an experiment. If you don't like IT, I promise on my ex-Boy Scout's honor never to do it again.

Well, I still say it and I'm right so far—Kuttner will never, EVER, beat "The Dark World." The "Mask" didn't quite live up to my expectations.

The best story in there is "The House of Rising Winds." The worst (three tied) "Journey," "No Escape From Destiny," and "The Seekers." But don't mistake me—they were all good. Well, I just hope "The Valley of Creation" is what you say it is, and with this I shall say goodbye—so I'LL say it, GOODBYE.—*1116 Fulton St., Woodmere, N. Y.*

Believe it or not, since you call that a rhyme
We're glad that you DON'T do it all of the time.
But if Kuttner's DARK WORLD gives you such a big kick
You and la Zimmer should be quite a click.

COMES THE DELUGE
by Jerri Bullock

Dear Editor: Have just finished the May ish of Startling and (ahem) TEV. You were waiting you said, to read the scorching words the females would pour in a deluge on Jack Clements? Well, you can't say he didn't ask for it

"Gushy" females indeed! Is man's conceit so great that he considers himself the only bearer of words of wisdom? Is his silly prattling so different, not *gushy,* simply because he bears the title man? I think not. If Jack will glance over TEV and TRS he will find quite a few goofy—er-r-r—gushy males.

In re-reading mr. clements letter I find no gushiness, it's true; but—and I trust you were waiting for

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this—his rambling comments on other people's letters was rather childish. (I bet he stays up nights thinking of clever things to say.) A person is entitled to write and think what he wants to about another individual, but what do we care?

I don't expect people to believe what I say is Gospel truth—they have their opinions, I'll stick to mine. I might try to persuade them, and they might try to change my mind. But I am *not* in the habit of continually reversing my viewpoint as Jack so glibly states.

And for your info, Jack, I wouldn't get near knitting needles with a ten foot pole. I can find much better ways to pass time, such as planning cruel tortures for the man-beast. I. E.: tying his hands down before he tells a fish story.

This mild explosion doesn't leave me much space for comment on this ish, but the lack of wordage doesn't mean I was disappointed. On the contrary: "The Mask of Circe" is the finest thing Hank has done in a long time. The others? Well, they were all good, in my opinion, except for "The Simple Life." "No Escape From Destiny" was a little different from the usual yarn—a clever whodunit. Finlay's "centaurs" was the best illustration.—*22200 Lemon Ave., Hayward, Calif.*

Okay, Jerri, you made a meal of clements, all right. As a matter of fact, modern psychologists have advanced a very reasonable theory to explain so-called mental changeability among the females of the species.

Their idea is that women, if anything, change their minds with much less frequency than men but that—thanks to their biological role—they don't like to commit themselves and therefore are apt to indulge in a lot of backing and filling before making up their minds.

Once the decision is made, however, women have a tendency to stick to it through the proverbial hell and high water. Anyone who has watched a woman try to select a luncheon or dinner from a crowded menu should get the idea.

Guess we men will have to wield the knitting needles from now on. Knit one, purl two, drop six—that's us.

SOUNDS DULL
by Sam Bowne

Dear Editor: I don't usually write to editors but I want to congratulate you on publishing a Merritt-type story without nymphomaniacs in "The Mask of Circe." The whole mag seems to be looking up since I started reading it during the war and this ish is the highest point yet.

Kuttner is an excellent writer, but can you induce him to get a new plot. This dual-personality-in-a-strange-world thing has been done by Merritt, ad nauseum by Van Vogt, and even, I believe, by Shaver. If he wishes to continue using this plot I have it worked out in a neat formula. There are four possible variations, all of which have been used.

Re Dan Mulcahy's letter in this ish, why don't you cut out the Hall of Fame and enlarge even more your fan facilities. Or even just scratch Hall of Fame. The old writers don't stack up with the new ones, you yourself have said it, and the latest offering is riper than limburger.

First our hero shoots lead slugs thru the little man, then he breaks his toe on him. After this the little man sticks his hand right thru the hero, with no resistance, and then picks up a corpse. That's just a start on the criticism.

Aside from this lemon, a swell issue. Please, more G. O. Smith. This isn't his best, but we know what he's capable of and he writes a type of "pure" science-fiction that is dear to my heart. It's good to see him in print again.—*18 Lexington Avenue Cambridge, Massachusetts.*

What—no nymphomaniacs! It seems to us Kuttner substituted the real article—namely nymphs themselves. Next time, send us your four plot variations and we'll try to add a few more. Fanzine editors please copy.

CHICKEN HEARTED
by Marvin Williams

Dear Ed: Gad sir you have offended all that is sacred to the glorious clan of STF. The MASK OF CIRCE was about the best thing Hank ever turned out but it was not scientifiction. It was purely and unquestionably fantasy. I did like it though. Unique idea all around. I have never worshipped Kuttner as some do but I'm gradually changing my opinion.

The Finlay pics were swell too. He's getting better all the time. I agree with Sneary, though. Stevens is good, better and best in the art line. I wonder what would happen if the artists wrote the yarns for one issue and the writers did the art work. The probable result would be the demolishing of both the magazine and you.

I can't start reading THE HOUSE OF RISING WINDS because I'm too chicken-hearted to look at that hideous concoction of flower-faced BEMs on the first page. I looked at it once while glancing through the book and I'm still a little shaky. Oh well, maybe when I attempt to start it next time I'll cover up the illo'. Of course I'm a little hardened to such things after reading H. P. Lovecraft's THE COLOUR OUT OF SPACE. Infinity ran wild with that guy.

By the way, I wrote Wilkie Conner a short curt letter telling him what I thought of him for his views of HPL and he wrote back and we've been regular correspondents ever since. An odd way to start a friendship but there couldn't be a closer one, hindered as we are by distance.

Rather a plentiful swarm of femme-fans' letters in TEV this ish. The femmes are all right I suppose but too many of them louse up an otherwise good TEV section. I agree with Miss (or Mrs.) Goldsworthy about Oona. In fact I think anything St. Clair ever wrote is corny.

She belongs in a woman's magazine of some kind. She brings in the young house-wife's views and blunders very nicely but its too "ouy-gouy" for me. Especially the one where she hides the space-port investigator under her pnuemoport (correct me if that's not spelled right). And then there was one part I didn't quite get. Was she going to cut the Dobridust up with that jig-saw or the investigator? Maybe she and you and Sneary know but I'm sure I don't.

What happened to Clements? Maybe the shift key broke on his typer or something. Er—no—couldn't, did and about six other words were in caps. Anything to attract attention I always say. But really JC carried that philosophy a little too far there, don't you think? If he ever does it again set it right anyway and watch him burn.

Jerri Bullock had a tricky letter in this ish. HPL was all right no matter what people say. Her remark about the C. Future comic strip might be a thought over which to ponder.

(HEH, HEH) Rick Sneary's bad spelling is off-set by his gleeful antics. He's a swell guy. I know him from correspondence and if you think the way he spells when he writes to you is bad, you should see the way he spells in the letters he writes to me. He makes an effort to spell right when he writes in to the mags.

Well, I'll be looking forward to some swell issues of both SS and TWS this year and I can't wait 'til that McDowell yarn comes out. He's really good and he's been a favorite of mine for ages.—*1431 2nd Avenue S. E., Cedar Rapids, Iowa.*

Scared of a Finlay BEM, eh? You're a character, *un type,* as our French cousins say.

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SON OF A BEM
by Mrs. Eva Firestone

Dear Editor: The verse sent in and your rhymes in answer are greatly enjoyed. Most of the letters are so clever that my courage never became great enough to join in the fun until this May issue. There is one Ethergram—Sir Clemency rushes in where Angels fear to tread! Of all the futile-feuds, worse than religious war! I marvel at his intricate-intrepidity. Jackie Boy, thinkest thou art Daniel of Bible fame?

Attention Girls! Genealogy is my avocation. If you will send all known information re the name Clements, I will trace his lineage to some obnoxious BEM, and furnish photostatic proof.

Lin Carter—Pardon me, we ARE interested in comments on the stories by ALL the letter writers. Joe Kirschnick—about ten years ago an author stated, via fiction, that the earth was a microbe in the blood stream of a mighty giant, so perhaps space is that fluid which circulates in the heart, arteries and veins of this Titan and his food of course would create space—savvy?

The ado over Merritt-Kuttner, Fantasy-Stf—is it possible for a normal mother to love one child more than another? In April TWS Gene A. Hyde wanted advice on how to rotate a cube simultaneously on three axes. My request is much more simple—astronomers believe that our solar system is a part of the Milky Way galaxy, and they have discovered no other sun-star having planet satellites. In this case, our earth is mighty important.

Now—if the universe is a sphere, where is our galaxy located, on the surface of the universe-sphere or inside? And what about all the other galaxies??—*P. O. Box #395, Upton, Wyoming*

Little Eva, you sprang a couple of real rugged questions in the tail of your epistle. You'd better drop a letter to the head man at Mt. Palomar or to Professor Albert Einstein, Mercer Street, Princeton, New Jersey.

Who says our old Sol has the only planets? We'd like a double check on that.

SOUR NOTE
by Philip Collins

Dear Ed: Why oh why did you have to stick in "The Mask of Circe," and "No Escape from Destiny"? If you ask my opinion, (You're gonna get it anyway) they were a couple of grade B lemons. Especially "No Escape from Destiny." The plot was dull and it seemed that it would be better fitted in some detective mystery magazine. I had to force myself to plow through it and when I was finished, it wasn't worth the trouble.

"The Mask of Circe" was a little better, but it was slow and sticky too, and my childish mind just couldn't understand what the darn thing was all about. And, just to sound good and sour, I thought that the ending was poor, and left you hanging in the air, because I kept mumbling over and over, "What happens to poor demented old Jay when he does get back to the island?"

But, thank goodness, there was something to hold up these two poor stories, and that was the short stories. I thought that "The Microscopic Giants" was one swell piece of writing, and I can easily understand why it is a Hall of Fame Classic. But there was just one thing wrong with it (as usual) and that was that I would sort of like to know what happened to the little men, and what their life was like, way down under all that rock. It certainly would be a good idea if it were possible, if a sequel could be done, even if it were not by the same author.

Well I guess that's enough about the stories, and so let's talk about the illustrations. It seems that Virgil Finlay has a monopoly, and hardly anyone else got any of their work in. It's not that I don't like Finlay's work, but it seems to me that his drawings are sort of cluttered, and with too many lines in them.

In other words, his work just isn't fresh-looking, and just to illustrate my point, take a look at the pic illustrating "After the Atom," and *that* is what I mean about fresher work, although I doubt if anyone will agree with me. But not on such a critical side, I thought that this months STARTLING STORIES was, on the whole, pretty darn good reading.—*1381 King Street, West, Toronto, Ontario.*

Well, Philip-with-one-l, you've a right to your opinions. In fact, we could make a couple of suggestions about what you should do with them—always excepting the one on Astarita.

OUR OWN NON-KENTUCKY DERBY
by Peter Leyva

Dear Editor: Well, here I am again with another epistolary clinker directed at your factory. Let that be warning enough.

"You pays your money and you takes your choice," was not said of the sport of kings alone. For, having paid my twenty pfennigs for the current issue of May's STARTLING STORIES I deem it my constitutional privilege to take (or make) my choice of stories in the issue referred to.

My mention of the so-called "sport of kings" gives me an idea of trying my hand at rating the May number in an equine (please, no gags) manner. With your kind permission, then—

May Issue Handicap
Purse: 10,000 Rick Sneary letters

HORSE	JOCKEY	ODDS
The Mask Of Circe	H. Kuttner	4-5
The Microscopic Giants	Paul Ernst	2-1
No Escape From Destiny	A. L. Zagat	3-1
The House Of Rising Winds	F. B. Long	8-1
Journey	G. O. Smith	8-1
After The Atom	J. R. Fearn	10-1
The Seekers	R. M. Williams	20-1
The Simple Life	Ray Cummings	6-1

HORSE	COMMENT
The Mask Of Circe	Rates nod
The Microscopic Giants	Steady going HofF entry
No Escape From Destiny	Good if ready
The House Of Rising Winds	Can upset
Journey	In and outer
After The Atom	Hard to figure
The Seekers	Clocker's tip
The Simple Life	Not much of late

Note: Ere the race starts "Bet-A-Million" Leyva is observed sneaking over to the two buck window and investing a brace of iron men on "The Mask Of Circe" to show. Smug and confident he awaits the result of the contest.

Running Description: By Clembake McCarthy.

"And they're off!!! And it's The Mask Of Circe going to the front, closely followed by The Microscopic Giants with Journey running third. The others are closely bunched. It's a close race, so far, folks, but I see they're starting to open daylight between each other now!

"Here comes Long on the House Of Rising Winds passing the leaders like a cyclone! The favorite is fading badly but Kuttner by great riding ability manages to keep him in contention! And at the half mile post it's The House Of Rising Winds, one length to the good, over The Microscopic Giants, by two lengths, over The Mask Of Circe, by half a length, over Journey, by a head, over The Seekers, by five lengths, over The Simple Life, by eight lengths, over No Escape From Destiny, by three lengths, over After The Atom!!

(Concluded on page 145)

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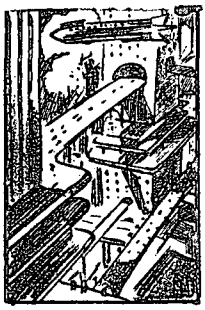

REVIEW OF THE SCIENCE FICTION FAN PUBLICATIONS

IT IS possible that we have been asking for it all along—though we don't see just how. At any rate, this time the roof fell in. We were getting just about our usual quota of fanzines and stashing them in the bottom desk drawer (the double one) for perusal and review and minding our rather multifarious other affairs and treating the whole thing as routine.

Then came a big envelope from Charles E. Burbee of the Los Angeles Burbees. Upon opening it we discovered it packed with fanzines. This recalled to us that we had received a similarly packed envelope some months earlier (with no return address) and had been holding it with modest impatience as a tardy submission to our ill-fated fanzine contest.

Actually, it seems, each batch was a complete mailing of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, sent in for review. This outfit is known to the initiate as FAPA and shall be so called henceforth in this column. Its members apparently get up fanzines and mail them around to other members as material for critical letters which are included in (and often completely monopolize) future issues.

So there we were with two FAPA mailings on top of our regular review material. Regretfully (our foot!) we stashed the earlier mailing as passé and decided to concentrate on the latter group. Then came another slue of fanzines, apparently from some lightweight affiliate of FAPA called the SAPS (don't ask us what *that* stands for)—whose publishers call their fanzines Sapzines. And finally we got an SOS from the British Fantasy Library, a laudable organization to which we are going to give first place in the column that follows.

We have waded through all the above mentioned mailings and have decided, in view of the highly personal nature of most of the Fapazines and Sapszines, to list them in toto but to pass critical word only on the few that seem outstandingly good.

So—to work.

Our friends in the British Isles have, as we all know, been suffering from an acute stf famine along with their other more serious (?) shortages. Since many of the books and magazines published during the recent war are virtually unobtainable, a group of leading fans has organized a library from which members can borrow those publications and books they desire to read.

Ron Holmes, 67 Lineside Road, Belle Vale, Liverpool, is Librarian; Nigel Lindsay, 311 Babbacombe Road, Babbacombe, Torquay, Devonshire, is Current Issues Department Director and Captain K. F. Slater, of the British Army, who may be reached through Miss Joyce Teagle, Riverside, South Drink, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire, is Liaison (information) Director.

Mr. Holmes, along with a letter explaining the purpose of the Library, has sent us a handbook, a catalogue and full sets of reports and library listings. He has done a whale of a job but there are still a lot of gaping holes in the stock of books and magazines on hand.

"I think," he saiys, "that you will agree with me when I state that to a great measure I have carried out what I set out to do. To give fans that which they need at the lowest possible cost to themselves by the only really applicable scheme, cooperation."

We quite agree with him and hope that some of you, perhaps with an embarrassment of fan riches, will see fit to offer help in the form of magazines or books. As we cannot print the catalogue we suggest you write Mr. Holmes before sending him anything, thus making sure you are offering needed material—or you might address your letter to Forrest J. Ackerman, 236½ North New Hampshire, Hollywood 4, California, who has some of the handbooks and catalogues for distribution in this country.

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This is a good one to get aboard—you'll not only be doing a needed service but your offerings will be gratefully received and you'll have an unparalled opportunity to widen your fan connections to an international scope. Go to it.

THE FAPA OFFERINGS

Heading the Faparade is THE FANTASY AMATEUR, so-called official organ of the association, containing news of interest to members, announcements and an enclosed poll-card on which the member is supposed to list his favorite thisa and thata on various elements of the 'zines put out by his fellows.

In hot pursuit come a highly mathematical pamphlet on THE RATING OF ROCKET FUELS by Thomas S. Gardner of Johnson City, Tennessee—a page from a Harvard University Mathematics examination, apparently algebraic in origin and neatly stamped at the bottom with No. 56—a four-pager by Ray C. Higgs of Connorsville, Indiana, entitled LONE INDIAN FRATERNITY ORIGINATES AND SPONSORS PLAN TO ABOLISH ADULT AND CHILD DELINQUENCY (sounds dull, doesn't it?)—quotations from Spengler and comment on that ancient vehicle of the cinema, Metropolis, by Robert Raphael—something called A VISIT FROM GRAHAM put out by Rick Sneary of South Gate, California—a highly useful FANTASY ANTHOLOGY INDEX put out by Sam Moskowitz and Alex Osheroff at 446 Jelliff Avenue, Newark 8, New Jersey—and an obsolete 1947 DREAMLAND POLL by Don Wilson and Howard Miller from 495 North Third Street, Banning, California. Heterogeny, thy name is FAPA.

BURBLINGS, Charles Burbee, 1057 South Normandie Avenue, Los Angeles 6, California.
BE IT KNOWNNE TO ALL, Harold W. Cheney Jr., no visible address.
FAN-DANGO, Francis T. Laney, 816 Westboro Avenue, Alhambra, California.
FAPASNIX, Walter A. Coslet, Box #6, Helena, Montana.
GLOM, Forrest J. Ackerman, 236½ North New Hampshire, Hollywood 4, California.
GOSTAK, Don Bratton, no address visible.
H-1661, Hevelin, 3761 Third Street, Riverside, California.
HORIZONS, Harry Warner Jr., 303 Bryan Place, Hagerstown, Maryland.
ICHOR, Dale Hart, Apt. 20, 1116 Georgia Street, Los Angeles 15, California.
(reviewed later in A-list)
JABBERWOCKY, Paul Spencer, 88 Ardmore Road, West Hartford, Connecticut.
MI SCRIBAS, Rick Sneary, 2962 Santa Ana Street, South Gate, California.
(contains a portion of excellent magazine bibliography in serial)
LIGHT, Leslie A. Croutch, Box #121, Parry Sound, Ontario, Canada.
(reviewed later in A-list)

[Turn page]

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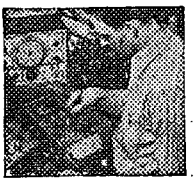

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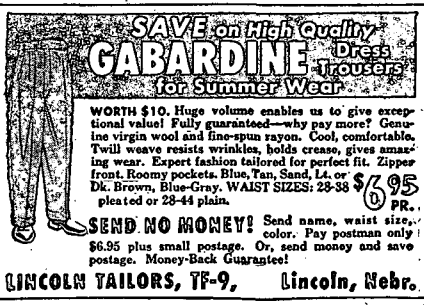

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MASQUE, William Rotsler, Camarillo, California.
(reviewed later in A-list)
MOONSHINE, Len J. Moffatt, 5918 Lanto Street, Ball Gardens, California.
(reviewed later in A-list)
EGO BEAST, Don Wilson, 495 North Third Street, Banning, California.
OLD AND RARE, G. F. Caldwell, San Anselmo, California.
ONE FAN'S OUTLOOK, Stan Woolston, 12832 South West Street, Garden Grove, California.
PHANTEUR, D. B. Thompson, Imperial, Nebraska.
(reviewed later in A-list)
PLENUM, Milton A. Rothman, 2113 North Franklin Street, Philadelphia 22, Pennsylvania.
(reviewed later in B-list.
SKY HOOK, Redd Boggs, 2215 Benjamin Street, N.E., Minneapolis 18, Minnesota.
(reviewed later in A-list)
SPARX, Henry M. Spelman III, Leverett House E-21, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts.
(reviewed later in A-list)
SOIPDALGEIF, R. P. Graham, H. Miller, D. Wilson, R. Ward and C. Burbee, no address.
SYNAPSE, Jack Speer, 4518 16th N.E., Seattle 5, Washington.
THREE EYE, no name or address listed.
YELLUM, Ron Maddox, c/o A. H. Garretson, Ministry of Foreign Affiars, Addis Abba, Ethiopia.

Which takes care of the FAPA horror—save for those magazines which we feel rate an A-listing review. Now for that Sapszine grue—we find at last that SAPS stands for Spectator Amateur Press Society, whatever *that* means!

BLUE BEM, Joe Kennedy, 84 Baker, Dover 2, New Jersey.
EGOBOO, Joe Schaumburger, 1822 Bathgate Avenue, Bronx 57, New York.
ESSENTIAL, no name or address listed.
BRILLIG, Joe Schaumburger, 1822 Bathgate Avenue, Bronx 57, New York.
FROZINE, Phil Froeder, 448 Demarest Avenue, Closter, New Jersey.
JOSE-PIEN, Joe Gross, no address listed.
NAMLEPS, Henry M. Spelman III, Leverett House E-21, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts.
QUEER, Norm Storer, 1724 Mississippi Street, Lawrence Kansas.
PLOOR, Walter A. Coslet, Box #6, Helena, Montana.
SUN SHINE, no name or address listed.
THE HANDS and OTHERS, H. Cheney, Little Falls, New York.
(somehow we think this little booklet got into the SAPS by mistake)
TAILS OF PASSIONATE FANS, no name or address listed.
TRUE FAN CONFESSIONS, Joe Kennedy, 84 Baker Avenue, Dover, New Jersey.
(rates a B-list review but won't get it)
TWIN STAR PUBLICATIONS, no name or address listed.

This is about as sub-sophomoric a gang of amateur publications as we have run across while sitting at this or any other desk. But, since most of those who put in time and energy composing these little gems are probably a bit on the sub-sophomore side(we query the gentleman of Leverett House) they undoubtedly get a belt out of the proceedings. We hope somebody did.

But before hitting the A-B trail, we wish to give a pat on the head to Captain K. F. Slater for his OPERATION FANTAST, the liveliest fanzine to come out of England in too many a long moon. We hope that wherever the gallant captain is sent on over-

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seas duty he will be able to get at a printing press or mimeograph machine. His efforts for British and World fandom will be missed otherwise.

Well, the A-list took a large upward leap for itself this month, thanks in part to the FAPA mailings. It's one of the best we've had to review.

CANADIAN FANDOM, No. 14, 118 St. George Street, Toronto 5, Ontario. Editor, Beak Taylor. Published irregularly, 10c per copy, 3 copies 25c.

Dr. David H. Keller's THE LANDSLIDE, a new short story by the eminent master, features this issue of a very up-and-coming 'zine and other articles and features are contributed by the editor, Fred Hurter Jr., Barbara Brovad, Les Croutch, Bill Grant, Harry Moore, D. J. Morantz and Alastair Cameron. Jim Gray and an anonymous other contribute fair verse. Clipped to the issue like a pilot fish was a small and informative booklet called TORQUE, giving dope on the Toronto Fan convention of July Fourth weekend.

DREAM QUEST, 495 North Third Street, Banning, California. Editor, Don Wilson. Published irregularly, 15c per copy, 2 copies 25c.

Another good issue chalked up for this crew, though we found Laney's Histo-Map of Fandom more a promoter of utter confusion than elucidating. We liked on the whole the somewhat exhaustive prozine review of Gilbert Sweason, got a chuckle out of Arthur Rapp's remarks on our own Margaret St. Clair, found Simmons a trifle pontificial for our taste and enjoyed Rothman, Gordon Elliott and Thyril Ladd—finally found ourselves inescapably perturbed by the final verse of Marjorie Nuttall's verse.

FAN-DANGO, 816 Westboro Avenue, Alhambra, California. Editor, Francis T. Laney. Published quarterly. No price listed.

The frenetic Fran Laney puts on a one-man show, airing more Los Angeles fandirt than has been around since the old SHANGRI L'AFFAIRES was toned down. His open letter (after the style of such noted epistleers as Jimmy Fidler and Louella Parsons) is truly a gem. He has some of the darnedest "friends" if the letter is one eighth accurate.

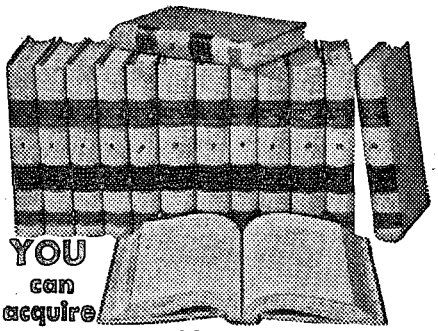
FANTASY ADVERTISER, 643 South Bixel Street, Los Angeles 14, California. Editor, Gus Willmorth. Published bi-monthly, 50c per year, 2/6d in England.

Still the bible of the fancollector—enlivened this time with an article on O. G. Estes, who drew illustrations for one of the E. E. Smith Skylark juveniles which did not appear when it was published. Also the pictures themselves, which are friendly amateur Pauls. Cartoons, which are interspersed among the various collectors' lists, are generally bright and amusing. Good stuff.

FANTASY REVIEW, 115 Wanstead Road, Ilford, Essex. Editor. Walter Gillings. Published bi-monthly, 3/6d per annum in England & Dominions (except Canada). 75c in U. S. and Canada. Single copies, 15c post free.

Just about the most adult, alert and informed gazette in the entire field—with a surprisingly Transatlantic viewpoint. This time Editor Gillings' feature article is a well drawn if too-brief typewriter sketch of what happened to the motion picture in Germany between 1913 and 1933—more specifically the prophetic motion picture. Dr. Siegfried Kracauer's "From Caligari to Hitler" supplies the basis for the piece. We wish we had Gillins and a FANTASY REVIEW in this country instead of what we are getting.

[*Turn page*]



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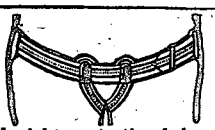
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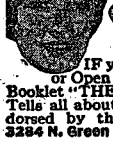
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FANTASY COMMENTATOR, 19 East 235th Street, New York 66, New York. Editor, A. Langley Searles. Published quarterly, 25c per copy, five copies $1.00.

Livened (?) by pictures of the late H. P. Lovecraft's maternal grandparents and of the author as a little boy (unlike Raymond Knight, he apparently failed to pose as a little girl as well), this is the usual scholarly, erudite and occasionally heavyweight fanzine entry. Sam Moskowitz' colossal history of stfandom carries on its intallment way and the rest of the issue is given over to Lovecraftiana. Worth its list price.

FAPASNIX, Box #6, Helena, Montana. Editor, Walter A. Coslet. Published irregularly, 10c per copy, four copies 25c.

This Fapazine rates the list chiefly because of its well documented prozine list. We hope the editor keeps it up.

ICHOR, 1116 Georgia Street, Los Angeles 15, California. Editor, Dale Hart. Published irregularly. No price listed.

Best poetry 'zine we have seen in some time. Bright all the way, if sophomoric in spots and with the best cover of the current crop.

IF!, 705 West Kelso, Inglewood, California. Editor, Conrad Pederson. Published irregularly. 10c per copy, six copies 50c.

Joe Kennedy, with a nostalgic entry, Sam Moskowitz, with a clever bit of pseudo-drama, and Don Wilson, with a backhand slash at Mr. Derleth, head a generally interesting group of entries. Modestly printed but good content.

LIGHT, Box #121, Parry Sound, Ontario, Canada. Editor, Leslie A. Croutch, published irregularly, 10c per copy.

Amusing amateur stuff surrounding the usual good reviews of various books and pamphlets with stf interest.

MASQUE, Camarillo, California. Editor, William Rotsler. Published irregularly. No price listed.

Copy in this one is weighed down by an interminable essay on "art"—but the issue contains the most imaginative and successful fan color printing we have yet seen.

MOONSHINE, 5918 Lanto Street, Bell Gardens, California. Editor, Len J. Moffatt. Published quarterly, no price listed.

Sub-sub-sophomoric fun in pictures, prose and poerty which somehow manages to get by on its spirit, to say nothing of what everyone seems to think is a half dollar attached to the front cover (it isn't).

MUTANT, 113 North Porter Street, Saginaw, Michigan. Editor, Bill Groover. Published irregularly, 10c per copy, six copies 50c.

George Young, Redd Boogs, Ben Singer and Marion Zimmer kick the gong around in this one to their own great amusement and the reader's moderate same.

NECROMANCER, 1619 Eastern Avenue, Baltimore 21, Maryland. Editor, David A. MacInnes, 10c per copy, six copies 50c.

Best item (and a darned good one) in this generally excellent 'zine is an article on the Frank Reade Jr. stf magazine of the nineties with a photo-offset reproduction of one of the covers. And Rex Ward comes up

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with a plea for space opera via, of all things, a laudatory review of our former companion magazine, CAPTAIN FUTURE. Interesting.

PLENUM, 2113 North Franklin Street, Philadelphia 22, Pennsylvania. Editor, Milton A. Rothman. Published irregularly, no price listed.

The former low Poobah of the Philcon comes up with a neat Fapazine in which he discusses the semantic approach so dear to current stfans, carrying it all the way to paranoia (the article, not the author). Thoughtful.

SHANGRI LA, Apartment #20, 1116 Georgia Street, Los Angeles 14, California. Editor, Dale Hart. Published bi-monthly, 10c per copy, six copies 50c.

The erstwhile Shangri L'Affaires puts on a sprightly self imitation in its curtailed-title version with just about as much (if not as lurid) controversial stuff as ever. This group—the Los Angeles Science Society, can get madder than anything.

SKY HOOK, 2215 Benjamin Street, N.E., Minneapolis 18, Minnesota. Editor, Redd Boggs. Published irregularly, no price listed.

Good thoughtful comment on fantopics which suffers from a sea anchor in the form of some of the worst verse ever (up to and including our own!).

SPARX, Leverett House E-21, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts. Editor, Henry M. Spelman III. Published quarterly, 10c per copy.

Sophomorics by Jack Speer and Norman Schlecter are compensated for by some good reviews and some off-the-arm information of fanzine trading by Vincent Williams. Just squeaks in on the A-list.

THE FANSCIENT, 3435 Northeast 38th Avenue, Portland, Oregon. Editor, Don Day. Published quarterly, 15c per copy, 50c per year.

This miniature mag packs plenty of meat for all its microscopia. Leading item is an essay on Beauty and its penalties by Dr. Keller. We hope this one stays in there.

THE GORGON, 4936 Grove Street, Denver 11, Colorado. Editor, Stanley Mullen. Published bi-monthly, 20c per copy, $1.00 per year.

Still a leading entry in the field despite an unexpectedly dim printing job. Phil Rasch has some fascinating background stuff on Merritt's Brittany and Joe Kennedy's takeoff on Moskowitz' fanhistory verges on the riotous. Even Lloyd Arthur Eshbach of Fantasy Press fame cuts in with a short verse on vampires of the non-Clara Kimball Young variety.

VAMPIRE INDEX, 68 Madbury Road, Durham, New Hampshire. Editor, Boff Perry. Published irregularly, 10c per copy.

A complete tabulation on what Joe Kennedy managed to put between the covers of his famed and lamented fanzine. Makes us homesick.

Well, that's the A-list and, we think, a darned good one. We're going to have to be a bit brief with the B's for reasons mentioned at the beginning of this priceless editorial screed. *Allons—*

Fantasy Times, 101-02 Northern Boulevard, Corona, New York. Editor, James V. Taurasi. Published bi-monthly, 10c per copy. Good newsy 'zine, this time featuring article on Dr. Keller by Jacob Hudson. Worth the dime demanded.

Klugg, 31 Linnaean Street, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts. Editor, Dave Thomas. Published irregularly,

[*Turn page*]

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no price listed. A newcomer to us, featuring a rather tripish story by Dennis Gillespie and the usual good book reviews by Henry Spelman III.

Lunacy, 1115 San Anselmo Avenue, San Anselmo, California. Editor, George Caldwell. Published irregularly, 10c per copy. Frenetic fanzine which takes a large bite out of Ackerman and offers the resultant tasty morsel to Edgar Rice Burroughs on an imitation silver salver.

Opinion, no address listed. Editors, Don Wilson & Howard Miller. Supplement to Dream Quest. Contains interesting fan opinion poll on just about everything. Despite listing of Jack Williamson (instead of Edmond Hamilton) as author of Conquest of Two Worlds, a generally accurate compendium.

Spaceteer, 1734 Newark Street South, St. Petersburg, Florida. Editor, Lin Carter. Published bi-monthly, 10c per copy, three copies, 25c. A good live 'zine which would rate A-listing if it weren't for the ghastly artwork.

Spacewarp, 2120 Bay Street, Saginaw, Michigan. Editor, Arthur H. Rapp. Published monthly, 10c per copy, three copies 25c. Well, we presume the editor and his colleagues had fun with these two issues. Best item in the April deal was Marion Zimmer's proselyting ad seeking famme fanpals. She pleads for written words from shady lad—uh-nuh—we mean lady shades.

Stfanatic, c/o YMCA, Warren, Arkansas. Editor, Hugh McInnis. Published irregularly, 6½c per copy. A modest entrant in the 'zine field which falls heir to most of the hekto woes known to fandom since time immemorial.

The Rocket News Letter, 91 Pine Street, Riverside, Illinois. Editor, Wayne Proell. Published bi-monthly, 15c per copy, $1.50 per year. This one seems to be slipping.

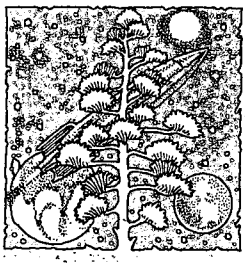
The Spectator, nothing listed. A Sapzine that got misplaced. 'nuff said.

Tympani, 514 West Vienna Avenue, Milwaukee 12, Wisconsin. Editors, Robert L. Stein & Redd Boggs. Published bi-weekly, 5c per copy, six copies 25c. Good newszine, this time accompanied by a supplement called Tympuni, of which the title tells the story.

Which brings us to the end of the longest review column we have written to date. Hope you liked it!

—THE EDITOR.

A NOVEL OF THE FUTURE



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By NOEL LOOMIS

Featured in the August Issue of

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THE ETHER VIBRATES

(Concluded from page 137)

"Now they've rounded the turn and are roaring up the home stretch! Oh, the favorite has faded worse than last year's S.S. cover and is now running a bad fifth! The House Of Rising Winds still holds the lead, by a length, over—but tally ho! What is this—it's The Seekers, coming like crazy!!! He passes The Microscopic Giants and challenges The House Of Rising Winds for the lead!

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Note: Above the roar of the madding crowd cometh the sad sounds of Kuttner's chalk players tearing up their ducats.

Official result of the May Issue Handicap:

HORSE	LENGTHS
The Seekers	1
The House Of Rising Winds	3
The Microscopic Giants	4
After The Atom	½
Journey	nose
The Mask Of Circe	head
No Escape From Destiny	5
The Simple Life	

Note: The word "eds" in the place price of The House Of Rising Winds stands for "edges"—not "editors." Feel better now?

So much for the races. May I comment a little anent T.E.V. before you throw me out the door?

As per usual the hallowed sanctum sanctorum that is T.E.V. boasted as neat a collection of screeds as could be found this side of Alpha Centauri. But as also per usual the remarkable Rick Sneary proved high man again on the T.E.V. totem pole. By the rood, how the lad can clamp a toehold on an adjective and make it holler "uncle" in an entertaining way! Keep it up, Rick. (Hey, editor! Ain't there some way you could get Sneary and Rob Le Roy to collaborate on a story—unabridged and unedited? This I want to see.)

Other good letters were by Gerry de la Ree, Van Couvering, Lin Carter, Kirschnick, Clements, etc. All in all, a fine gathering of the clans enlivened, as always, by the gay skirl of thy merry editorial bagpipe or dinna ye ken wha' I say, Mac Gregor?

As for the illustrations the inside pic on page 93 was far superior to the rest of the art. Really a fine piece of work. Cover okay except that it seems to suffer a wee bit from yellow jaundice. Easy on the saffron hues, will ya, Bergey?

Finlay's pic on page 11 was okay also. After studying it at great length I have suddenly become unfond of flowers and the ancient Greek version of the Hawaiian lei. And look at that dope Pan! All the guy can find to do (with that bevy of femmes around him) is to fool with a double-barreled pea shooter whilst squatting next to a Hellenic spittoon. Is this the sort of thing the Greeks had a word for?

Time (not the magazine) being of the essence and the fact that I have overstayed my visa in T.E.V. I judge it most wise to effect a hurried (though dignified) exit ere you sic the office boy on me.

In the hope that you will continue your good works indefinitely, I remain yours truly.—*221 So. Victoria Ave., Atlantic City, N. J.*

That was no spittoon, that was an amphora, supposedly filled with wine of Ossa, gin of Thessaly or rum from the Sea of Marmora. Anyway, them nymphs were Aegian the eyes.

And so, spent by the thrills of the Leyva Handicap, we once again take leave of the Ether and its matchless Vibrations, sailing into the sunset with the valiant little ship Argo's mink sails also set. Evoe and adios.

—THE EDITOR.

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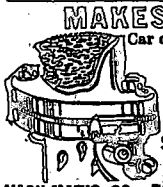

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